

IN SPITE OF FOES



GENERAL
CHARLES
KING ★ ★ ★

Jack Schaffer Aug 1947 Baltimore

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OR

TEN YEARS' TRIAL

BY GENERAL CHARLES KING

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FLASH AFTER FLASH, PUFF AFTER PUFF, THE RIDGE-LINE BLAZES

IN SPITE OF FOES

OR

TEN YEARS' TRIAL

By GENERAL CHARLES KING, U.S.V.

Author of "Ray's Daughter," "The
General's Double," "Marion's Faith,"
"A Tame Surrender," "Trials of a
Staff Officer," etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY WILLIAM T. TREGO



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CHAPTER I

THE sunshine of a glorious autumn morning was slanting along the valley of the Pawnee, throwing bold shadows into the "flats" and lighting the landscape for miles with crimson and gold. The dew, sparkling on the wild "bullberry" bushes, on tufted buffalo-grass and tiny flowerets, mantled the bluffs with diamonds, and was still so strong as to defy its one enemy, —the sun god. The frost had smitten the scant foliage on the banks of the winding stream and the leaves had donned their glorious hues, setting forth their richest color, as the swan reserves its song, to meet the universal conqueror. The mist rose slowly from the silent, shallow pools, and from distant village and from the neighboring heights the smoke of chimney or

camp-fire soared straight to the skies. It was a morning to send the blood leaping through young veins and to brighten the eye of age,—a morning in which all nature seemed to rejoice and all mankind to thank God for the joy of living. Yet, in the midst of a scene of such peace and health and hope there stood, alone, a man still young, from whose face hope, peace, even health apparently, had fled, and whose attitude was one of utter grief and dejection. He was leaning against a branching willow, gazing into the depths of the broad pool of the Pawnee, just above the rapids, with God alone knows what thoughts seething through his brain, when the silence of the morning was broken by sudden, stirring sound. Close at hand, from the willows across the stream, there rang out, loud and clear, the call of a cavalry trumpet, followed almost instantly by the appearance of half a dozen horsemen moving at steady walk from a break in the timber and descending the gentle slope to the ford. Foremost rode a powerfully built soldier in the field uniform of the United States Horse. Behind, side by side, came two younger soldiers, all three evidently officers; then followed a brace of troopers—orderlies or grooms—and a jaunty lad with the yellow braid and glistening trumpet slung from

the shoulder. Straight through the ford the leader splashed, looking neither to right nor left, the sunlight peering under his hat-brim, and cresting with gold his bushy eyebrows and bristling mustache. Straight at his heels followed his little party, and then from the same opening in the willows there burst into view the head of a column of cavalry, moving at the same measured pace and with the same erect and martial bearing.

At the first sound of the trumpet the lonely figure at the edge of the pool darted back out of view and, bending low, stood where by peering through the bushes the column could be kept in sight; but when a moment later the fluttering guidon of the foremost troop came suddenly flaunting into the sunshine, all its brilliant color instantly enhanced, some intense emotion seemed to seize upon the lonely watcher. Rising to his full height, with his clinched hands thrown above his head, he whirled about, and with an inarticulate cry sank like a stricken bull to earth and lay, face downward and buried in his arms, his whole form shaken with sobs.

Troop after troop until the fourth had passed the squadron crossed the ford and moved steadily up the southward slope, following a winding road that led to the group of buildings

crowning the height, and still the young man lay there. Over beyond the low line of bluff to the west a cloud of dust began to rise and there was sound of martial music. A tall flagstaff, looking like a slim white arrow, pierced the sky-line from that westward crest, and the little bit of bunting fluttering at its summit was suddenly lowered, only to be replaced a moment later by a symbol that told it was some unusual occasion at the post,—the arrival, perhaps, of some dignitary of superior rank,—and in confirmation of this view, as the great garrison flag swung up to the head of the staff the earth trembled, and the boom of a battery salute throbbed on the ear. Even then there was no change in the attitude of the sufferer, unless it were that he buried his face still deeper in his arms; but all on a sudden he started,—half raised his head and listened.

Somewhere up-stream a clear, powerful voice was shouting,—

“Langdon! Eric, old chap! For God’s sake, where are you?”

Hurriedly the listener drew his handkerchief hard across his eyes, shaking his head in the effort to pull himself together. But he gave no answer.

Presently the call was repeated,—louder,

nearer, and now bounding hoof-beats could be heard.

“Eric, I say! Eric!”

There was something almost commanding in the cry, and still no answer came from the man who evidently recognized both voice and name, —to whom, indeed, the former seemed to bring a bit of hope, or help or comfort, for the utter despond in his pale, sad face was lightened the veriest trifle. Yet he turned again towards the river as though resolute to ignore the summons.

The next instant, glad and winsome in the sunshine at the edge of the timber, there galloped into sight a young officer whose brave blue eyes and ruddy cheeks, and fair, crisply curling hair, would have invited more than a single glance, while the grace of his strong yet slender form and his capital seat in saddle would have made him marked even among a score of his fellows. He rode with utter abandon, leaping his mettlesome, excited horse over the few obstacles along the fringe of willows as though he and his steed had wings, and this was easy as flying.

“Eric! Eric Langdon, I say!” rang out the brave young voice once more, and then, as a gleam of the sunshine shot through the willows,

his eagerly searching eyes caught sight of the lone figure, the object of his morning scout.

In an instant he had sprung from saddle.

"Eric—you—you!" he began in almost boyish eagerness. "Stand where you are, Ronald!" he commandingly spoke to his beautiful horse, and then, unhesitatingly leaving him without fastening of any kind, fairly leaped into the timber and to the side of his friend. Whipping off his gauntlet he held forth his bared hand.

"Remember Old Spott's story, Eric, that we used to hear from those cavalry fellows?—Never give a gloved hand if you want to talk business with Indian or friend? Old man, you—you——" and for a moment he paused, partly for breath, partly for words, and the bright, blue eyes seemed suspiciously near brimming,— "you've given me a bad night and a woful morning. If it hadn't been for Melville—God bless him—I don't know what I'd done. He saw I was just all upset. *He* said, 'You may find him down by the river.' *He* said there'd be half an hour before review, and for me to tell you for him—for him, by God!" and here the young soldier's emotion was too much for his eyes and his home teachings—both, "that you mustn't think of going until he has had a chance

to say a word of friendship. Eric, what more do you need to keep you from giving us all the slip?"

Almost impulsively the elder turned, tears starting into his own haggard eyes.

"Did Melville say *that*, Rodney? Do you—— You're not making it better than *he* did?—God bless him anyhow—in your loyal effort to—comfort me?"

"Swear to it, Eric, if need be, and I know it's what you deserve to hear." Then, with rueful smile, "Even if you *did* try to pull out without giving *any* fellow a chance. I missed you just after one,—just after the Brocktons' function broke up. Woodrow and I scooted over to your room the moment we could get away, and there was your luggage all packed, but no sign of *you*. Couldn't find Hurricane either,—wish you could have seen that old nigger sitting on the back steps crying this morning!—so I started through the post, scouting for you everywhere I thought you might be, except—except——" and here an honest blush went up to the young fellow's brows. "Well, it was three o'clock when I left a note for you in the old roost, and five when I got in there again and found my note there, but no—you; only old Hurricane boohooing at the back—— Listen! Yes, there goes adjutant's

call. Eric, I may tell Melville you'll come? *Steady* there, Ronald!" he interjected, for the spirited charger, well knowing the call, had whirled about and was pawing and snorting in manifest impatience. His owner moved to his side, but his eyes never left the form of his friend.

It was a moment before the latter could speak. Meantime the young lieutenant had vaulted into saddle and was at once caressing and controlling his pet, who was fretting and plunging in his eagerness to gallop to his place "in battery."

"May, tell the major I thank him with all my heart. I shall be there."

And now "Ronald" sprang away like a deer, shooting up the slope towards the west as though life had no higher joy than a hard gallop. Lieutenant May turned in saddle to wave a friendly hand to the figure standing at the edge of the willows. Then horse and rider in long, easy curve rounded the shoulder of the bluff and skimmed out of sight.

Half an hour later a brilliant spectacle lay before the eyes of Eric Langdon. It was one to thrill and delight even an unprofessional eye; but his was the eye of a practised soldier to whom every detail was familiar,—a soldier who many a time had taken active and, up to within

three months, prominent part in similar pageants. Now, it was the will of the law that he should be cut off from further participation in scenes of the kind. By the stern edict of a court-martial, duly confirmed by the order of the President himself, Langdon stood summarily dismissed from the military service of the United States.

It was a sad, sad story. It has had its parallels. It may have more. There was no finer young soldier in the battalion of cadets, and great were the prophecies of classmates—indeed, of instructors—when Langdon's name came up for discussion. The corps rose up and cheered him on graduation day when a great public official in handing the handsome cadet captain his diploma, remarked that a young gentleman who could ride and drill as he could ought to be most welcome to the finest regiment in creation, and a very pretty girl, sitting close to Senator Spotts, a ponderous member of the Board of Visitors, whispered to that veteran beau, "Now, *there's* a man I want to know!"

And so it happened that before the graduating class were fairly out of cadet uniform and into their first "cits" a messenger, in shape of the official orderly of the commandant of cadets, came to Eric Langdon to "invite" his presence

at the quarters of that high official, and there was he presented anew to the distinguished Senator to whom he, in company with his classmates, had already done the orthodox and conventional homage required of the graduating cadet to the Board of Visitors, and now the Senator, all suavity, led forward an extremely pretty and vivacious damsel. "Mr. Langdon," said he, "this young lady has fallen in love with the corps in general and your—horsemanship in particular, and I know you will be delighted to reciprocate." It was an odd moment for Langdon. He would have been at a loss to know what to do or say had not the girl herself, with merry words and laughter, relieved the situation of its embarrassment.

That was the beginning. They met frequently that summer. They parted in the fall when he went to his regiment, he utterly infatuated, she half delighted, half regretful. She couldn't *think* of marrying in the Army, she said. She admired it—and him—of all things, but that was all. Twice in that first year he managed to get leave and to go to her and plead again. He had some little money beyond his pay and felt that he could support her in comfort, but he little dreamed of the scope of her desires. He was kept blind to the fact that she

had hopes and ambitions far beyond his. Then one day the sudden death of a Senator shocked the community, and Langdon, reading the news, never imagined the influence it was to have on his life. His letter of condolence to her brought answer that was more than kind. Their marriage was sudden but immensely "swell." She came with him to the regiment a few months, "stunning" everybody by the elegance of her toilet and the extravagance of her ideas. Then she declared she could not bear garrison life and pined for Washington. She got him a detail on staff duty and he would not go. His place, he said, for a few years, at least, must be with the regiment. She went without him, and presently he was bombarded with bills the payment of which swamped him,—took his last cent. It mattered little, she said, Senator Spotts's only sister—his elder by several years—was to leave her every penny, and indeed, in the hard times—for him—that followed, more than once that he knew of and more than twice that he knew not of, that sorely-tried maiden came to the rescue with cheques of startling size. Then there came rumors that the lovely, if volatile, Mrs. Langdon was flirting desperately at the capital, and one of the very best young "duty" officers in the regiment was beginning to look haggard

and shabby. She got him to sign notes—far beyond his pay—to meet her needs, promising that “Cousin Spotts” would meet the notes. They began to fall due just as that amiable lady was taken to her grave, and then the will was contested,—the legal heirs won, and Mrs. Langdon had to begin parting with jewelry, not to meet those notes but her own cravings. Then came more bills, more debts, morphine.

Such were three years of Eric Langdon’s married life. The next and last was the worst. Striving all the time to stick to duty and keep up appearances, he was wearing himself out in the vain hope that his military record for efficiency might offset the terrible stigma of these pressing debts. Now the creditors were becoming importunate and raining their complaints upon his colonel and the War Department. No matter how or by whom contracted, the debts were held to be his,—that he was accountable for all. By the time he was twenty-seven and finishing his fourth year of service with the regiment Eric Langdon looked like the patriarch of the subalterns with his lining face and sad dark eyes, and when, during the next year, the news came that his wretched helpmate (save the mark!) had breathed her last in a “retreat,” everybody said “Blessed relief!”

And yet, poor lad, he mourned her and went and wept over her grave.

Then he came back to the regiment to face curious glances—and those thousands of debt. Among the junior officers there were a few, brave boys like Woodrow and Rodney May, who strove to cheer and sustain him. But Torrance, who had “struck it rich” at Fortress Monroe and married an inane young woman of much wealth, was intolerant of a fellow at his wit’s end for money, and there was a captain in the garrison who developed into one of Langdon’s persecutors. This was Felix Nathan.

It was the fashion of the juniors of the regiment in their moments of irreverence for rank—and they were many—to refer to this distinguished battery commander as “Sheeny.” Whether a trace of blue Semitic blood ever flowed in his veins is doubtful. According to “old Sam Elder,” long time one of the oracles of the artillery, who “sized up” the young man soon after he succeeded in getting into the famous corps, “it was more than doubtful whether he had blood of any kind except that species of fluid that circulates in the frog.” Nobody in 1870 could have traced Nathan’s antecedents. He shunned the topic himself, and left to others the comforting theory that they were

in some way connected with the rudiments of the ready-made clothing business—or else the pawn-shop. He had been commissioned in the infantry at the instance of the Hon. Mr. Steinmeyer, who represented in Congress a wealthy, if inconspicuous, district in New York. He found a few months' sojourn in a fighting regiment on the far frontier so utterly to his distaste (the mere mention of Indians would turn him livid long years after) that when the army was reorganized he literally bought a transfer into the artillery, where the splendor of his attire and a certain Germanic cast of feature won him the title of "the Baron," or sometimes Herr von Fertigen Kleidern. Certain pecuniary loans with which he favored some of his new-found comrades gave him, at first, a glamour as of generosity. The remorseless rigor with which full payment was later exacted, at most inconvenient times and conspicuous places, led to the enduring appellation,—that of Sheeny.

But the artillery works and polishes. Nathan had to work, drill, and study. He was no fool. He labored with his dancing-master, and speedily shone in both the ball-room and in ballistics. They had sent him to Fortress Monroe in hopes of damping his desire to remain in the artillery, and he mastered the course with

comparative ease. They "put up jobs" at his expense at mess by the introduction of sausage and spare ribs in undue proportion, and Sheeny said he feared they didn't know the good from the bad; sent "home," he said, for dainties, and amazed them with the quality and quantity of sausages shipped to him.

And then in course of time he cut in and won the heiress of the season, and that marriage made him. His wife had most influential connections. They frequently spent summers at Bar Harbor or Newport. They had the most sumptuously furnished quarters in garrison and very "swell" visitors much of the time. They entertained lavishly, and so it came about that their social supremacy was established, not without protest, but it was no use "kicking against the pricks."

All the same, Nathan was mean. He lavished his cigars and champagne on certain of his callers and treated with cold courtesy the others. His wife's chums, if she had any, in the regiment were the two or three whose gowns sometimes nearly matched her own. They distinctly "put on airs" over their fellows, and for a time a weakling of a post-commander permitted it, but that was before Melville's day, and Melville was a regimental adoration.

One thing Nathan hated Langdon for was the fact that the latter could "take the battery" and make it do anything. He was a consummate drill-master and handler of men. Things never went so well as when the captain stepped aside and the lieutenant took command. Regimental critics twitted Nathan with the fact, and it made him furious. If anything could have helped Langdon it would have been service under some other commander. There were three other captains who would have been glad of his services, but Nathan refused to allow the exchange. Time and again there were sharp disagreements between them, and thrice, when Langdon had to appeal, the decision went in his favor.

By this time the battery had been made a part of the great Western garrison on the Pawnee, where two squadrons of cavalry and four "light" or mounted batteries formed the main features of the command. A veteran dragoon officer was at the head of affairs, a man with much conscience and little sympathy, and the way he "sailed in," as the boys said, to polish up the entire military establishment was a caution. The Nathans gave a sumptuous dinner in his honor about the first thing, and the colonel pitched into Nathan within forty-eight hours

all along of the condition of his horses, to the intense joy of the uninvited, because this was the last thing that dinner was supposed to bring about. Nathan accepted the criticism and said he could not help himself, his lieutenants were so careless. It was at this time that renewed complaints came to head-quarters concerning the non-payment of those notes. Poor Langdon was setting aside a portion of his mortgaged stipend and sending it each month to "preferred" creditors, but the others kept up the growl, and it must be admitted that along about this stage of the game, in his grief and despond, Langdon had sought solace, at times, in whiskey. All this Nathan reported to his chief when asked about the financial status of his subaltern. Had old "Cat-o'-Nine-Tails," the post-commander, consulted the veteran major, who had but recently arrived and assumed command of the batteries, he would have heard a different tale, for Melville knew a soldier and a gentleman when he saw one, and his sorrow for Langdon was expressed in something deeper than words. He *made* him come to his quarters and spend an evening or two. His wife, his children, and a very interesting niece, all seemed to take a hand in Langdon's entertainment, but it lasted only a week or so, for matters were hastening to a

climax. The colonel had sent for the young officer,—roughly told him that the army was no place for men as deeply involved as he,—went on about “neglected duties,”—frequent lapses over liquor,—all of which was grievous exaggeration, yet honestly believed by him to be true, and poor Langdon came away stung, stunned, and hopeless.

That night, very late, long after every one but the guard had retired, a fire broke out near the haystacks, and while the men were at work with bucket and hose and the entire command was on duty it was observed by more than one officer that Langdon was perceptibly under the influence of liquor. Sitting up all alone and brooding over his troubles he had probably taken to the bottle.

Three nights later came a clash. Melville’s pretty niece, a wholesome, pure-minded girl, was devoted to riding. Melville asked Langdon to take her out, and Captain Nathan, Mr. Torrance, and two or three of their set, viewing the performance from afar, made comments thereon in presence of young fellows like May, who liked Langdon more than a little, and it all got to Langdon’s ears. He marched straight to the club-house. It was just before tattoo, and a number of officers were seated on the

veranda chatting, smoking, and sipping cooling drinks. Torrance had been chief offender and him he hailed.

"Mr. Torrance," said Langdon, his eyes ablaze, his lips very white, "you are reported to have said thus and so this afternoon."

"I did," said Torrance, rising from his chair. "What have *you* to say about it?"

"This" was the only reply, as a stinging blow sent Torrance crashing over the table.

The instant action of officers present stopped further hostilities. Nathan sent Langdon to his quarters in arrest and his company clerk to work. Charges and specifications, ten pages drawn out, were preferred. No plea was listened to. A court was ordered in due season and it had no alternative. On a still October evening the order that day received from Washington was formally read to the command, and next morning, when the department inspector had them all out for an early review, Langdon, without whom reviews seemed hardly complete, looked sadly on from a far corner, a practically ruined man.

But there were friends to go with him to the station after his brief interview with Melville—noble-hearted Melville—that day. May and Woodrow and others of the boys, besides some

scores of "boys in blue" who had slipped away and were bent on giving their pet lieutenant a parting cheer, and then there was an incident that became historic.

The railway station was like all far Western Stations of those days,—an ordinary brown frame building with projecting roof overhanging the platform and a broad open space at the gable end, and here it was, in the presence of half a dozen officers and quite a swarm of citizens and "boys in blue" off duty, the memorable *rencontre* occurred. The instant Captain Nathan stepped from his handsome carriage, with the whistle of the express already sounding far down the Pawnee, he found himself confronted by Langdon, whose dark features took on no flush of the wrath that consumed him, but whose erect and slender form—patent in its athletic proportions even through the simple civilian suit he wore—quivered from head to foot. It was vain for Nathan to dodge. The words came like the sting of a whiplash:

"You are no longer my superior officer, Nathan, and there's only a moment to say my say. Your language at the club this morning has been told me. Now hear my reply. To-day we stand, you in the pride of your wealth and power, I with the world to begin again. More

than to any man in the regiment I owe my troubles to you. Yet, I wouldn't exchange my soldier record for yours if reinstatement were offered me this minute. No! I'm not to be intimidated by any gesture. All I have to say is that, if God spare my life, before ten years pass our places shall be reversed. You will be at the bottom, I at the top. *Now* you may go."

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CHAPTER II

MATTERS military at the great cavalry and artillery post on the Pawnee were not altogether harmonious during the fall and winter following Eric Langdon's departure. There were some things and many soldiers Captain Nathan's money could not buy, and a ruder shock and harsher awakening to his true position this plutocratic batteryman could not well have had than came to him in that scene at the station. He had gone thither to meet and escort to his quarters two prominent and wealthy railway officials from the distant East, one of them a relative of his wife. He had counted on their coming to make a profound impression in the big garrison, and his arrangements for their entertainment included two days of quail-shooting, a riding party, some special drills, and three or four elaborate dinners with dancing to follow in the evening. His first impression on catching sight of the crowd at the station was one of complacency,—the officers and men were gathered there to get an early glimpse of his distinguished guests. It never occurred to him that Langdon would be going away on that

train, still less that any number of the garrison should go to bid him farewell and Godspeed. He figured that Langdon would have to hang about the post a day or two settling up his affairs. He had made inquiries as to the amount in which Langdon was indebted to the mess and to the establishment still maintained at the edge of the reservation by the descendants of an old-time post trader. When, therefore, he stepped from his stylish carriage as the footman sprang down and opened the door, he was startled and shocked by the apparition of Langdon himself and stunned speechless by that bitter denunciation. Glancing about him he saw some half a hundred soldiers, with a sprinkling of civilians, and not one face that reflected anything but sympathy for Langdon and dislike for himself. The rush of the incoming train released him from the humiliation of his position, as the men swarmed about Langdon, eager to clasp his hand, while the captain, friendless and alone, hastened to the rear sleeper to meet the magnates. To lead them to his carriage he was compelled to return through a throng of his own men just as the train began to move, and a stentor of a sergeant shouted, "Three cheers for Lieutenant Langdon,—the best officer of Battery 'D!'" Whereat, with lusty lungs and

swinging caps, the soldiers shouted again and again until the train slipped away round the bend under the bluff, and not one of their number had so much as a look, much less a salute, for the captain. It was no time to resort to discipline then. "I'll fix 'em for this when I get 'em back to barracks," he swore to himself, but the sorest-hearted, bitterest man to return that morning from the railway to the post was he who rolled homeward in his cushioned chariot, with liveried retainers on the box and untold wealth beside him.

It chafed him, too, that Woodrow, May, and other young officers should gallop past him on the homeward way, without so much as a peep at his imposing companions or a touch of the cap to him. The magnates were vastly interested in the dashing riding of the party and in May's beautiful thoroughbred, and asked questions concerning them which only added to Nathan's keen sense of humiliation and defeat. He couldn't reach May, for that young gentleman was Melville's adjutant and kept his mount in his own little stable in rear of the bachelor quarters, but Woodrow was poor and rode a battery saddle-horse, and that evening at stables the captain sent for him, and with cutting emphasis informed him that the order permitting

officers on temporary duty with the light batteries to use a public horse applied only to occasions of drill, parade, or prescribed exercise. "No officer in my battery, sir," he concluded, "can be permitted to use my horses to scatter dirt in the faces of my guests and to race impudently past the battery commander without a salutation of any kind." Woodrow stood attention, saluted, waited a moment, and said, "Anything further, sir?" to which Nathan responded, "That's all, sir." And then, as with another punctilious salute, the subaltern was about to turn away, the idea that had been uppermost—the sting and humiliation of the morning clamoring for expression—forced from Nathan the very words Woodrow was longing to hear and that he lost no time in rushing off delightedly to tell to his fellows at the club. "There is one matter you need to be warned about, and one that, should it come to the ears of the commanding officer, may yet subject you to arrest and court-martial,—your prominence in that riotous, even mutinous, demonstration at the depot this morning. When officers and men conspire to cheer a person dismissed in disgrace from the army they attack the administration and are guilty of gross insubordination. I shall not report the occurrence myself, because of my

known antagonism to such characters as Mr. Langdon, but you'll be most fortunate if the colonel does not hear of it."

Now, Woodrow had taken no part in the cheer,—that was a matter confined almost entirely to the enlisted men,—but he had no objection whatever to Nathan's believing he did, and would have openly rejoiced had Nathan preferred charges against him,—it would have been bliss to disprove them. As for the captain's angry rebuke, based upon the ostentatious disrespect with which the party of subalterns had charged past his carriage on the up-hill drive, Woodrow had no defence to offer. It was a boyish ebullition on the spur of the moment, May having led on with a "Come ahead, fellows! I'm not going to trail behind that pawn-broker," and the rest having impetuously followed. But it was done, and their regrets were on account of the regiment, not for Nathan. It was bad form, as they owned, to show to civilians contempt for a brother officer, no matter how much they might feel it.

These episodes growing out of Langdon's departure were the talk of the club, and indeed of every household on the post, the rest of the week. The inspector-general could not help hearing them, but said not a word. The colonel

commanding was a sorely perturbed man. He felt that if he did not punish somebody,—do something to vindicate the good order and discipline of his command,—there would be a rap from department head-quarters, possibly from Washington, and this was more than a candidate for the star of a general officer could contemplate with equanimity. He excused himself the moment dessert was over at Nathan's dinner-party that evening, and, though it was after tattoo, began an investigation of the affair. A dozen of the batterymen and all the junior officers present at the station were summoned to the adjutant's office, and in five minutes he had the facts. There was not the faintest attempt to equivocate or dissemble. Lieutenants May, Woodrow, Sparrowe and Le Duc said they heard the call for three cheers, and May said that, though he didn't shout, he swung his cap and had all the appearance of it. He disclaimed any disrespect for the court, the reviewing authority, the President, or the post-commander. Mr. Langdon was his best friend. He was sorely distressed at his dismissal and he *did* come within an ace of cheering, only he knew Langdon himself would have disapproved. The colonel used some rasping language, in the course of which, as a cavalryman, he reflected

on the sense of subordination and discipline that did *not* appear to prevail in the batteries, thereby antagonizing every gunner at the post; and then, dismissing the officers with no little asperity in his reprimand, he summoned Sergeant Rancey, an Irish idol in Battery "D," and whirled on him with the stern query, "Is it true you called for three cheers for Lieutenant Langdon, the best officer in Battery 'D'?"

"True as shootin', sorr," was the prompt reply.

"Go to your quarters in close arrest, sir," said the colonel, and without the quiver of a muscle of his sun-tanned face the Irishman spun on his heel and stalked out. Then Sergeant Blossom, a down-East Yankee, was summoned in.

"Did you join in the cheers for Lieutenant Langdon?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir," was the emphatic answer.

"Didn't you know that was tantamount to mutiny?"

"No, sir. There was no such thought or intention. We meant to show our sympathy for a beloved officer and an unfortunate man, that was all."

The colonel wheeled impatiently in his chair. He loved the old-style soldier, who knew

nothing beyond the will of his superior officer. These modern evolutions of soldiers in the ranks, men of education who read and thought for themselves and spoke better English than some of his officers, were thorns in his flesh. He did not know just how to take Blossom, much less what to do with him, but compromised by bidding him stand aside until he had questioned the others. One after another a dozen came in, promptly acknowledged that they had cheered the departing officer, disclaimed all imputation of disrespect and, inferentially, any expression of regret. Every mother's son of them seemed to wish to be understood as maintaining that he had a perfect right to cheer, and, if he hadn't he was ready to take his punishment. "Confound it!" said the colonel, to his silent adjutant. "If I slap 'em in arrest Nathan won't have a sergeant for duty. The whole damn battery seems to have been in it. Tell them to go to their quarters,—go to grass,—go to Ballyhack, but there must be no more cheering. I won't have it."

"There won't be," said his staff officer, dryly, "now that Langdon's gone." He, too, had loved the fellow and was sore-hearted over his downfall. "There's nobody else they'll be apt to cheer for, unless it's Melville."

The colonel turned suddenly and glared, but the adjutant's face was placid and unconcerned as he quietly stepped to the outer room and in low tone bade the assembled throng disperse. Then in silence he rejoined his chief.

"You're always quoting Major Melville," said the latter, petulantly. "Is there no one in your own corps worth considering?"

"Plenty," answered the adjutant, "yet none just like Melville. *There's* the man to straighten out this matter, colonel, if you really want it done."

"I can straighten out post matters without having to call on an—an—an outsider," answered the colonel, haughtily, for he had the same conception of his corps that the Chinese had of China,—everybody not of it was an outside barbarian. Moreover, he was distinctly and keenly jealous of Melville, and it kept cropping out in the most absurd and palpable way. Early in the spring, when ordered to the command of this important station, the department commander had said to him, "We have applied for Melville to command your artillery. He'll be a tower of strength to you and relieve you of all responsibility in the management of the batteries," and this remark, intended to reassure, had just the opposite effect. The colonel did

not wish to be relieved of any care or responsibility; did not wish it to be supposed he needed a tower of strength. He was one of a small but somewhat prominent class among our senior officers who rejoice in extended responsibility, and who prefer hours of personal work to delegating one iota of authority or power to anybody else. He was so oddly constituted, moreover, that he would gladly have added to his functions the ladling out of medicines and the distribution of hospital stores. His mania was for scraping and saving for Uncle Sam. He would spend hours of valuable time pruning off one dollar from the estimate of the post-quartermaster or squeezing a cent a bushel from the hay or grain contract. He had never before served with mounted artillery, but unhesitatingly assumed supreme control of the affairs of the batteries, criticising and forbidding the expenditure of paint for the carriages and caissons, cutting down the number of horse-shoes, condemning the amount of grain and hay fed out in the daily allowance, and putting a stop to shell and shrapnel practice as being viciously extravagant. "It will all be straightened out when Melville comes," said the gunners, but it wasn't. The colonel had never met Melville before, but had had him dinned into his ears every time he

talked with an enthusiastic artilleryman, and, to use his own expression, it "made him tired." "Melville is a sort of a demigod according to these artillery fellows," said he, "but I propose to run my own post, and no man shall run me."

So when Melville arrived and reported for duty the colonel met him with much solemnity and state. Ordinarily offhand and impulsive in speech and manner, he now assumed an imposing dignity of mien that filled his adjutant with merriment and did not deceive Melville in the least. That clear-sighted, grave-mannered soldier listened with every appearance of courteous interest to the colonel's exposition of what he considered the needs of the batteries, and the batteries' discipline and instruction, but as his own views were neither asked nor desired, gave no expression of them. The colonel called upon the new arrival at the quarters of Captain Cannon that evening and found a dozen red-striped fellows there, all clustered about their demigod, and the colonel's manner was, if anything, more awfully impressive than in the morning. He remained but ten minutes, and the gunners drew a long breath and looked at each other as he left the room, and burst into irrepressible laughter as he stalked away from the gate. But Melville came back to their midst with Captain Cannon,

they having seen the colonel safely down the steps, and not a line in Melville's face betrayed the fact that he saw anything comical in the situation. Within the week he was partially settled in his new quarters and fully engrossed in his new duties. He found the post-commander pottering about the battery stables and gun-sheds day after day, giving orders direct to stable sergeants, farriers, and blacksmiths, but not a line of his face or a tone of his voice betrayed the faintest irritation or disapproval.irate captains came to him to protest, and he said "Patience," and nothing the impetuous post-commander could say or do ever seemed to throw him off his mental balance for a moment. He was ever grave, exquisitely courteous and entirely subordinate. For a month the colonel had things all his own way. Then one day, all unannounced, there dropped in an inspector, who gave two days to the batteries and two hours to the rest of the command. The colonel insisted on being with him everywhere. The inspector found fault with the condition of the horses' feet and declared them insufficiently shod. He was referred to the order of the post-commander. He said all of the horses looked too finely drawn, as though they had come in from hard campaign, and was shown the post-

commander's order cutting off two pounds of grain per diem. He said the gun-carriages looked dingy, and was informed of the post-commander's prohibition of further use of paint. He criticised their neglect of gun practice with service ammunition, and again the post-commander had to shoulder the blame. He dined with that dignitary, as did Melville and Nathan and two or three cavalrymen that evening, and the colonel drank much of his own champagne and talked incessantly in defence of his policy, on which point the inspector and the gunners were diplomatically silent; but, within a week of the former's departure, down came a letter from department head-quarters embodying all his criticisms and directing the post-commander to take measures to correct the matters complained of without delay. They were all of the post-commander's devising, and, "without the ruffling of a feather or the turning of a hair," as the boys expressed it, without a word of altercation or expostulation, Melville had won the battle. He met the colonel with the same grave, imperturbable courtesy, with that utterly unimpeachable respect of manner. Even though the post-commander was fuming with wrath and the consciousness of defeat, Melville allowed not a trace of exultation to be visible, not a word

of triumph to escape him. He gently, gravely rebuked one or two youngsters who crowed in their delight, and by the utter superiority of his mental equipoise rasped the irate colonel infinitely more than if he had given voice to the sense of victory. The colonel was forced to the conclusion that the senior major of artillery was a bigger man at department head-quarters than he had ever been, and his jealousy redoubled. And yet the soldier in him compelled him to respect Melville. He couldn't help it. Officer or man the soldier did not live in all the service who knew him and did not honor. Pure in speech, refined and courteous in manner, a gentleman in the finest sense of the term, in every thought and word and deed; just, temperate, merciful, a model of fidelity to duty and to principle, a man to whom an oath was well-nigh as intolerable as a lie, he so ordered his life that friends and comrades studied him in vain for fault or foible, and enemies were unknown. Among his officers were men who, a quarter of a century before, had been his pupils in the section rooms of "the Old Academic," where they well-nigh worshipped him. "Never," said they, "no matter how exasperatingly stupid a cadet might be,—never was Melville tempted to use an impatient word."

Among the younger officers were those who, only a few years back, wore the gray at the Point when Melville was their honored commandant,—the position of all others in the Army of the United States which has the greatest influence on the character and development of the young soldiers of the nation,—the position of all others most difficult to fill,—and Melville was the idol of the corps of cadets. At the different stations where he had served, at Newport, at Fortress Monroe, at the Presidio of San Francisco, he had left his impress ever the same. They spoke of him as the “Bayard of the Batteries,” and one of the traditions which his old regiment gloried in was the mountain campaign against a fierce and recalcitrant tribe in which Melville led his guns into the fastnesses of an unexplored wilderness and brought the savages to bay. Add to all this that his home-life was as beautiful as his professional career had been well-nigh flawless, and even crotchety, fault-finding, jealous old “Cat” owned himself powerless to penetrate the armor of Melville’s perfections, and May and Woodrow, thinking sadly of the comrade lost to them, found the words constantly springing to their lips, “If Melville had only come earlier!”

And yet, as we have seen, it was unlikely that

Melville could have prevailed in a matter such as Langdon's who had done so much to hurt his own cause. The major had discovered the good points in the post-commander much sooner than the latter would admit that there was anything remarkable about Melville. By mid-October, however, the genuine soldier in "Cat's" constitution had compelled in him an admiration and respect for the gravely courteous artilleryman that, in spite of the lingering jealousy he felt, made him desire Melville's friendship. Long ere this he had realized that battery horses were built on far different lines from the "troopers" he loved, and, being much heavier,—haulers instead of carriers, and fed and shod for draught and prepared for severe and sudden strain,—should never have been cut down from their allowance with the view of making them conform to his ideas of how a horse should look. "Cat" ruefully admitted to himself—only—that he had come near spoiling some two hundred and fifty draught animals and nearer still to making one ass who should be nameless. It was not until a month after Langdon's departure, however, that he mustered up manliness to say to Melville, "How much a fellow thinks he knows about some other fellow's business—until he tries. Now, I had no more idea that a battery

horse had to be so much heavier,—'course I could have read it all up in the tactics, don't you know, but I hate books somehow,—and I ought to have realized that battery commanders like Hatnor and Singer, at least, knew their biz. I don't take any stock in—in Nathan. His horses had hides on 'em like a Yellowstone buffalo; why, I had to give him hell the first week I got here—and he gave me a swell dinner. But I just wish you would consider you're at the head of the artillery part of this establishment now, Melville. I believe it's best to leave it all to you."

And the two gravely shook hands. "Cat," as has been observed, had a conscience. After a moment's silence he began again: "Then there's another thing. That adjutant of mine—damned impudent fellow at times, if he is a good officer—has never forgiven me about Langdon. He doesn't speak of it, of course, except when I draw him out. I wouldn't stand that, you know. But he says if I'd been here longer and had known more 'bout Langdon and as much about Nathan and Torrance as I do now, I wouldn't have been so hard on him. He says I ought to have sought your views. Well, pr'aps I ought, Melville, but I didn't get to know you at first. Where is that fellow now, anyhow? D'you ever hear from him?"

"I have heard once or twice," answered Melville, gravely; "but he prefers to say nothing of his occupation. His creditors, at least, are furnished with his address."

"You think he was a very good soldier, I am told," said "Cat," looking keenly into the major's face a moment, then turning to scrutinize as keenly the column of horse just moving leisurely in from morning drill.

"An exceptionally fine one," said Melville.

And at that moment the exceptionally fine soldier, hat in hand, was standing patiently, silently in the ante-room of a great railway superintendent. The half-dozen chairs had long been occupied by others as wistful looking as himself. There were a dozen more silent, shabbily dressed men wearily lounging about. They had been waiting since eight in the morning for an audience, but some matters of grave import "up the road" occupied every moment of the magnate's time. Clerks were hurrying in and out. Other officials, with anxious faces, came and went. Every now and then some of the waiting party would slip quietly out and, returning, hold whispered conferences with others of their kind. They were all, apparently, men of more or less experience in railroading, and Langdon stood among them an alien and a

stranger. They looked at him queerly when the clerk came out, nodded to him and held open the door. Hat in hand, Langdon passed through a room where half a dozen men and women were clicking at typewriters, and was shown into a small, sunny corner apartment. The superintendent sat at his desk, a stenographer beside him. A well-dressed, handsome man of fifty was nervously pacing the floor.

Holding out a note the superintendent said,—

“You brought this from—from our president, Mr.—Mr. Langdon. What do you know about railroading?”

“Next to nothing, sir, practically, as I told the president.”

“Then I can’t see why he should send you to me. What line of work have you been at?”

“Soldiering.”

The superintendent found time to laugh. “That’s bad preparation for the work we require of our men. We have no use for soldiers.”

“No?” said Langdon, his pale face flushing a trifle. “I recall two occasions on which my regiment was hurried to protect your property against your own men, and now that you’re in for another strike, I thought you’d be glad to hire men who would stick to their posts. I can at least handle a brake or fire an engine as well

as the clerks and typewriters you are sending out to do it, and I'm more used to roughing it."

"D'you drink?" asked the official, bluntly, then wished he hadn't, as he studied the pale, clean-cut features, the clear, unflinching eyes. "Er—no—you don't look it."

"I have—on a few occasions. I do not now."

"Are you willing to go west of the Mississippi and take your chances of being killed as a scab, and can you go—to-day?"

"Yes."

"Hold on a minute, Gregory," said the gentleman who had been pacing the floor, but now stood an interested listener. "Mr.—Langdon, is it? Didn't I hear something of you at Fort Pawnee? Weren't you in Captain Nathan's company? I thought so. We have no use for you, sir."

When Eric Langdon reached the street and the open air he felt numb and dizzy. It was noon and he had had no breakfast save a five-cent cup of coffee at a little street stand. Once upon a time the president of this great corporation had visited the Hygeia, and became the recipient of all the courtesies of the officers' club at Fort Monroe. On departing he had somewhat pompously said to Langdon, "If ever I can serve you in any way, sir, be sure to let me

know." And Langdon marvelled that the letter written by the president in New York did not command instant recognition at the general offices in Chicago. His last dollar had been spent to take him thither, and he stood at high noon in the heart of this great thronging hive of trade and traffic, a stranger in a strange land, stunned and wounded, cast out by the class with which he had foregathered, faint from lack of food, knowing not where to turn for help or comfort, when striding towards him through the hurrying throng, sturdily holding their own against the human tide that twice a day sweeps almost resistlessly from the arched doorways of those towering business blocks in the wonder of the Western world, two soldiers in the warm, blue overcoats and trim forage-caps of the regular service. The glittering device above the visors danced before his eyes, the soldierly forms were swimming in mid-air as he blindly staggered towards them.

"My God, Jimmy!" said the nearest, as he caught the fainting man in his brawny arms, "it's—it's Lieutenant Langdon."

CHAPTER III

THAT evening half a dozen subaltern officers were gathered about the fireplace in the cheery mess-room at Fort Sheridan. The post was new and unfinished. The great city lay temptingly near. The November gale swept, spray-laden, from the stormy billows of the lake, and snow-squalls had driven the command to their overcoats long weeks before the townsfolk ten leagues inland began to think of turning out in winter garments. A bleak and forbidding spot it looked when the wintry waves beat high on the bluffs, but there was one homeless, weather-beaten traveller to whom at nightfall of that dreary day it seemed a blessed refuge. Against the stiff blast it was a long walk from the station to the mess-room, but, supported by the strong arms of two sturdy boys in blue, the new arrival was fairly rushed along over the hard-beaten path. He had no overcoat, and the civilian garb he wore was of the cut and style of three years gone by and fitted him all too snugly. He was numb from cold and fatigue, and his brain was a bit muddled by the heroic treatment administered by those amateur physi-

cians, the soldier boys. He had fallen across their path faint from hunger and sleeplessness, and disheartened by his experiences of the morning. Recognizing him instantly, for they were of his own regiment, the gunners had borne him to a neighboring bar and brought him to with that military cure-all, kill-all,—whiskey. They had read trouble and suffering and hunger in his thin, white face, and their hearts were bigger than their purses. The free-lunch hour was nearly spent, but they succeeded in getting a bowl of hot soup and a huge ham sandwich, and, while one of their number stood sentry over his late superior, huddled in a chair by the stove, and answered evasively the innumerable questions of the inquisitive hangers-on, the other ran ten blocks to a recruiting office, where he told his story to the sergeant on duty and borrowed three dollars until payday, when, had the sergeant so demanded, as many did in the so-called good old days of the army, he would gladly have paid back five for the accommodation. Thus reënforced Corporal Ryan returned to his friends. Langdon was led to the railway station and given a more substantial lunch, he the while accepting the bounty of these soldier Samaritans in mingled helplessness, humility, and gratitude that would have

broken Rodney May's heart could he have seen it all and set Morrow and Le Duc to swearing. The man was dazed and benumbed by the weight of his troubles and the potency of soldier whiskey. He was trying to pull himself together and think. He knew by name several well-to-do professional and business men of Chicago, who at one time or other in his past, at "the Point," at Newport or Fort Monroe, had begged him to let them know when next he came to Chicago, and no Chicagoan conceives the possibility of life without coming to Chicago. He had the cards of some of these gentlemen somewhere in his trunk, but that was at the station. He had the check still in his pocket, but not a cent wherewith to pay an expressman to take it somewhere if he had anywhere to tell him to take it. He reasoned that with a night's rest, a bath and clean linen, he could muster up strength and pluck to go in search of these cordial associates and guests of the old days. There must be employment for willing hands and brains, he argued, and all industries could not be dominated by Nathan & Co. But that night's rest and bath, breakfast and trunk, how were they to be had? His conductors were full of hopeful suggestion, of loyal, confident assurance. All the lieutenant had to do was to go with them

out to "Shurd'n" and the officers would welcome him with open arms. Who was there? he asked. Ah, yes, Merrivale: he was a class-mate at the Point. Nelson? They were together in the same battery at Monroe. Hyatt, Hoyt, and Stanton,—three boys like May and Woodrow. Yes, they would welcome him for auld lang syne, and yet, he shrank from it with utter repulsion. He, who had ever been leader and authority, how could he appear before them now, so broken, so humble, so stricken with poverty and shame? There was just one thing left him,—his watch, but that had been his father's, and the thought of pawning it gave him keen distress. Still, he asked Ryan, as they sat in the stuffy waiting-room, if he knew where the watch could be accepted as security for a suitable loan, and Ryan said they were going out to "Shurd'n" to attend to all that—without security. Langdon began to feel drowsy and numb all over and begged them to take him into the air. They did, and tramped him up and down for fifteen minutes, with the result that he was soon again chilled to the marrow and shivering. They compassionately sought to give him more whiskey, but he shook his head. Something told him it was not helping him. Then they took alarm. A man must be ill in-

deed in the eyes of the Celtic soldier when a drink won't help him. It still lacked half an hour of train time. They had medical practitioners of small calibre attached to recruiting stations in those days, and Ryan sent his comrade on the run to the north side office, and, as luck would have it, back came the doctor. Brief examination was more than enough.

"You've got to get to bed and have good treatment," was the almost instant verdict, and helplessly Langdon bowed his head upon his breast. It was dusk when the way-train let them off at Sheridan. Ryan sought to wrap his overcoat about his failing patient, but Langdon refused. The honest Irishman thought it was because the officer was too proud to be seen in a private's uniform and felt no rebuff. The officer would have taken it gladly had there been another to spare. "If I weren't too old to 'list," he had said to his humble companions in Chicago, "I'd take a blanket on the spot."* They hurried him against the rising gale towards the officers' club and mess-room, well knowing that there they would be apt to find more of the commissioned force than elsewhere. He was

* To "take a blanket" used to be the American soldier's expression for enlisting,—just as in England Tommy Atkins "takes the shilling."

breathless, weak, shivering, when they reached the door and were confronted at the very threshold by two officers muffled in their capes, plunging out into the blast.

"What on earth have you got here?" gruffly queried the foremost, halting short in displeasure at the sight.

"It's Looten't Langdon, sorr," said Ryan, with a touch of his cap. "We found him sick and starved in town, and Dr. Fownes said fetch him straight here."

"Here? Man alive! this is no——"

"Shut up, Bremer!" hurriedly interrupted the other. "It *is* Langdon! Why, Eric, old boy, don't you know Nelson? Come right in. Bring him right in here, men," and, half leading, half bearing, they ran the drooping outcast into the light and warmth of the club-room, scattering the group at the fire and sprawling him in a deep, easy-chair before the blaze. "Give me that hot Scotch of yours, Snipey," ordered Nelson to a youngster in battery dress, who eagerly obeyed. "Now, Eric, swallow and don't say a word," and the hot liquid was absorbed in the midst of profound silence. "Tell me again the doctor's directions, corporal," said Nelson, after a moment's study of the effect of his potion.

"That the lieuten'nt needed to be put to bed

and a doctor wid him," was the Irishman's rendition of the order, whereat there was a chuckle.

"All right. I understand. You men did just right. Steward, give Corporal Ryan and his comrade a good, hot toddy. Thank you both, men. I'll see you in the morning."

And they were going when Langdon feebly held out his hand and whispered. Nelson bent to hear.

"He says you two saved his life and he wants to see you when he's better. So do I. Get a stretcher from the hospital and my buffalo-robe and blankets, Ryan. Now, we'll have you fixed all right in five minutes, Eric, old boy. Snipey, see if Pills is in the card-room. What's your hurry, Bremer? I may want your help."

The burly officer was again making for the storm-door. He growled some inarticulate answer and shot out into the storm. Nelson glared after him a moment and frowned. "We don't need him," he said, as he turned back to Langdon, over whom others were now sympathetically bending. Two or three of the party had drawn aloof and were conferring in low tones, glancing occasionally at the group by the fire-side; then, taking up their caps and overcoats they edged away to the door. Again Nelson glared, took silent note of their faces and gave

a significant bob of the head. "There's as much human nature and human sympathy in that squad as you'll find in a skin game," muttered he, to a silent crony. The latter looked grave and perturbed.

"They never knew Langdon, and they only see the possibility of the colonel's coming down rough on us for harboring and consorting with a dismissed officer."

"Dismissed be damned! Langdon's a better man to-day, broken as he is, than the cad who preferred the charges," was the hot reply.

"That's why I'm with you," was the quiet rejoinder. "All the same, men like Bremer and those dough-boys will say the court declared the charges sustained and Langdon disgraced."

"Disgraced for smashing that sneak Torrance? By Jove! I hold him in higher esteem——"

"Ah, Nelson, it isn't all that. It's that unpaid bill business,—all that load of debt that snowed him under, and you know it."

"Know it? yes; and know, what's more, how little he was to blame. Had our colonel or Melville been in command there, do you suppose they would have let him be court-martialed? No, sir! It was Sheeny Nathan's snide work with that damned old numskull of a dragoon,—

old Cat. He never had the bowels of a snake. Find the doctor, Snipey?" he eagerly asked, as the youngster came hurrying back.

"Coming the minute he finishes his hand," was the answer; and, true to his word, the young army surgeon speedily entered and came at once to the reclining figure in front of the fire. Langdon had been feebly replying to the sympathetic questions of one or two associates of other days. Now, with white drawn face and sombre eyes he looked up at the new arrival. Professional decorum and the tenets of his cloth required of the physician an impassive yet sympathetic and reassuring demeanor. But to the surprise of Nelson and Hoyt the doctor plainly started the instant he caught sight of the patient.

"This—gentleman is——?" he faltered, paling a trifle and looking inquiringly about him.

"Eric Langdon, a classmate of Melville's at the Point and my comrade at Monroe," answered Nelson, stoutly. The doctor was new to the post and to him, and he wished it to be understood from the start that Langdon was his friend, his guest, and as such entitled to the best Fort Sheridan could give him. The doctor's hesitancy and change of manner put him instantly on the aggressive.

"I beg pardon," quickly spoke Dr. Armistead. "Mr. Langdon's face was familiar. I fancy I have seen his photograph. But that is of no consequence. Permit me," he continued, pulling himself together with evident effort and assuming the conventional manner of the physician. He bent and took Langdon's wrist and gazed thoughtfully, scrutinizingly, unflinchingly, into the deep, haggard eyes. There was a moment's silence. Then, straightening up, the doctor spoke: "Mr. Langdon is to be with you, Mr. Nelson?"

"Certainly."

"Then I shall send the steward with medicine from the hospital. I should get him to bed as soon as possible——"

"I've sent for a stretcher, robes, and blankets," interposed Nelson, sharply. "That's what I intended to do from the start."

"Very good. Now,—a word with you." And the doctor drew the artilleryman aside. "Your friend will need nothing to-night but some hot broth and sedatives. If, however, he should be restless or ill, or if you become anxious," and here the young surgeon seemed to hesitate in embarrassment, "I suggest your calling on Major Bloodgood, my senior."

"You consider it so serious?" asked Nelson, in quick alarm.

"No," was the answer, "but——"

"But what, Dr. Armistead?" asked Nelson, hotly. "Am I to understand you decline to see my friend and guest?"

The doctor flushed. He was a Virginian, "jealous in honor," sensitive to a turn. It was a moment before he spoke. Then the answer came calmly enough.

"No, Mr. Nelson; but your friend will probably—decline to see me. Here comes the stretcher," and so saying the doctor left the room.

Half an hour later, in Nelson's own bed, comforted with a hot foot-bath and nourishing food, Langdon closed his eyes to thank the God that had not left him friendless in his prostration. He heard the voices of old comrades in the room below. He heard Nelson tiptoeing about the bed, arranging lamps and books for the night. Nelson had spread some blankets on a roomy old couch and was patting and shaking up a pillow when the steward came softly in with some phials and medicine glasses.

"Dr. Armistead says," he began in low tone, when to his amaze Nelson sternly whispered "Hush!" and, clapping his hand over his own

lips to emphasize the order, glanced in anxious fear towards the bed. The caution was too late. With dilating eyes Eric Langdon was struggling from the pillow and striving to rise.

"What is it, Eric? Lie still, man," spoke Nelson, soothingly yet commandingly, as he hastened to the bedside.

"Doctor who?" demanded Langdon, with menace in his tone.

"Dr. Olmstead, man," answered Nelson, with prompt mendacity. "O-l-m-s-t-e-a-d—Olmstead. What's got into you beside broth and one hot Scotch? I'll give you another presently if you'll settle down and behave yourself."

"Olmstead was not the name," was the stern answer. "Don't trifle with me, Nelson. You said Armistead, did you not?" he continued, whirling sharp on the steward, and that amazed and confounded compounder of drugs could only gulp and turn redder in the face.

"It *is* Armistead then," said Langdon, with full conviction. "Send that man out—and his bottles with him," he continued, turning full on Nelson again. "I've got to talk to you." And, obedient to a signal, the steward withdrew.

For a moment there was dead silence. Throwing himself back on his pillow, his lean, long hands outspread on each cheek and temple,

Langdon lay staring at the ceiling. Then in sharp, almost savage tone, he demanded, "How long has that man been at this post?"

"About a month or less. Why?"

"Because he or I must quit it inside of twenty-four hours."

Nelson stood a few seconds gazing full into the set face and gleaming eyes of his friend. Little by little he was recalling and piecing together the stories that had been whispered about Eric Langdon's pretty, volatile, reckless wife,—about her daring life in Washington while her husband was on distant duty with his battery, about the attentions and devotions of elderly reprobates in and about the capital, men whose pockets seemed lined with gold and whose records were seamed and lined with scandal. But there were tales of still another, a younger man, a distant kinsman, a Virginian of grand old family, a boy lover in her early girlhood, a man who became her shadow and sought to be her knight, for there was a tale of a scene at the Shoreham café,—a Senator in his cups and a stripling doctor in all his youthful strength and chivalry, a sneering jest between one half-drunken nabob and a kindred spirit and reputed rival at an adjoining table, an instant spring from a third table on part of a tall, athletic

young gallant in evening dress, a stern, furious demand for immediate apology, followed by a knock-down blow that sent five millions sprawling in bedraggled human shape,—bottles, dishes, and glasses raining and crashing upon him. They dragged him out, covered with rage and lobster salad, and bore him off to bed. Even in executive session the story was suppressed, for there was no bar to the confirmation of a certain appointment to the medical corps of the army. Indeed, was it not whispered that the appointment was made at the instigation of certain Senators “to get the young man into the army and out of Washington”? Nelson was not much of a repository for gossip. He listened only impatiently at best and remembered but vaguely. Yet now it was all coming over him again, bit by bit, that Armistead was the hero of that exploit, that in the winter of '84 and '85 there was lively discussion in Washington society as to whether Armistead was there to get Mrs. Langdon into mischief or out of it. Those who knew him well and of his infatuation for her in her girl days swore stoutly that he was ever standing between her and scandal. Those who hardly knew him at all, and they were twenty to one, took the opposite view, and those who in the least knew her had no charity

for either. Until commissioned and ordered out of Washington, however, he was her shadow, as has been said, and yet it was his tribe, his own brothers, who instigated the proceedings that diverted Cousin Spotts's little fortune from the maw of Mrs. Langdon to their own itching palms. And now, of all places on earth, here was Armistead at Fort Sheridan, and here was Eric Langdon under Armistead's care and his, Nelson's roof. This, too, at a time when Langdon sorely needed rest, peace, and friendly aid. "By George!" said Nelson to himself, "it is fateful."

But Langdon was the first to break the silence.

"What is the first train back to Chicago?"

"Seven-twelve to-morrow morning, Eric. But not a peg do you stir till we straighten you up. Dr. Bloodgood shall attend you, though the other—is a 'liver' man. There's no reason you shouldn't take his medicine, dear boy. Come now, be reasonable. You need this bro-mide or whatever it is."

"Not a drop!" was the fierce reply. "Get me out of this, Nels, for God's sake! Even if I have to walk!" he cried, feebly struggling to rise; but Nelson with his powerful frame was on him in a minute. Hoyt came sprinting up the stairs and thrust the bewildered steward aside.

"Just send my man for Bloodgood, will you?" panted Nelson to the new-comer. "Then help me strap this lunatic. *Do* quit your struggling, Eric; you'll only make yourself a thousand times worse."

The sweat was starting from Langdon's brow and the muscles in his neck stood out swollen and distorted. He was fighting fiercely for liberty, he who so short a time before with long sigh had thanked God humbly for warmth and refuge. All the misery of his married life seemed to have hurled itself in concentrated force upon him again and robbed him of his reason. Nelson had to summon the steward to his aid, and Hoyt, too, when he returned, and at last between them they wore their frantic patient out and the poor fellow sank exhausted upon his pillow, buried his streaming face in his arms and sobbed, sobbed like a little child. It was thus the senior surgeon found him when in surprise and manifest annoyance he appeared, but the instant he was made to realize that the stricken man before him was Eric Langdon, Bloodgood's injured air gave place to quick sympathy and interest. Long and carefully he studied his shivering patient. Little convulsive shudderings seemed to traverse Langdon's frame and his sobs grew feebler. He moaned

wearily at intervals, and the steward was sent on the run with a note to Dr. Armistead and an order for certain restoratives from the hospital. It seemed an age before he returned. Langdon lay in semicollapse when at last his step was heard, and the doctor had felt compelled to administer tablespoonfuls of brandy.

"What on earth kept you?" demanded he, angrily. "I could have gone there and back a dozen times."

"So could I, sir, but I couldn't find Dr. Armistead anywhere. The patrol coming in from the station said they saw him in civilian dress going out at the gate."

"Impossible!" sharply retorted Bloodgood. "He couldn't leave the post without my consent. Drop the medicine and go to the colonel's and see if he's there. I cannot leave this case for two hours. He'll have to look out for the others, and I've got some instructions to give him."

But when the steward returned from the commanding officer's it was with a message that startled both the post-surgeon and the two officers present.

"The colonel's compliments, sir, and he says that a sudden emergency called Dr. Armistead to town. The colonel had a note from him and sent back his permission, but he supposed, of

course, that the post-surgeon had also been consulted."

There was silence for a moment. Bloodgood looked wonderingly at the steward; finally nodded towards the door, and the man understood and left the room. Bloodgood closed the door behind him, and then Nelson spoke, impetuously as ever.

"By God! I never supposed an Armistead could be a coward!"

And then Langdon began to murmur. They listened, but could only distinguish his dead wife's name.

CHAPTER IV

It was a week before Langdon was allowed to sit up, and a weak and fragile thing he looked, but meantime there had been sport for Chicago papers at Sheridan. There usually is. To begin with, Dr. Bloodgood had pitched into his assistant for quitting the post without his knowledge or consent. Armistead replied that while it might have been without his consent, it should not have been without his knowledge, as the same means had been taken of notifying the post-surgeon as in the case of the commanding officer,—a note sent by Armistead's servant saying that a telegram had just called him to Chicago on most urgent personal business. The train would be along in twenty minutes. There was barely time to change uniform for civilian dress and run for it. There was no time to hunt up both the post-surgeon and commanding officer. The servant declared he rang four times at the doctor's and, getting no answer, concluded that the gale had deadened the sound of the bell and such effort was useless; so he crammed the note under the door and went his further way. But Bloodgood was in ill-humor. In all that

raging storm he had had to struggle about the big post in answer to demands for medical services, and he said things in his spleen that reached the ears of Dr. Armistead before the eve of another day and led to an open breach between the senior and junior practitioner of the post. Dr. Bloodgood asked the colonel commanding if he had seen the telegram Dr. Armistead asserted had come to him from town. The colonel had not, and considered Dr. Armistead's word as conclusive. Dr. Bloodgood intimated that he had reason to believe, and so had other officers, that it wasn't the coming of a wire from town, but a man, that drove Armistead out of the post in such a hades of a hurry, and it must be admitted that Dr. Bloodgood set but a poor example of self-control, and that, with so poor an example in his senior, the junior could not be too severely blamed for hot language at Bloodgood's expense. The colonel threatened both with arrest and court-martial if any further *rencontre* took place, and demanded to know who were the officers who thought as did Bloodgood, that Armistead had fled to avoid a man,—and who was the man? Through clerks, orderlies, and kitchen-door cackle the affair got out in exaggerated shape—and the reporters on a special train. Then flamed the columns of Chicago's

unterrified press with head-lines of startling proportions. "Another Scandal at the Fort! Duel Nipped in the Bud! Row in the Regiment! Further Sensations Sure to Follow! Colonel Sharpe Defies the Press! Prominent Officers Arrested!" And in twenty-four hours what had been a placid and fairly orderly military community was engulfed in a whirlpool of gossip and prostrated by the contemplation of its own enormities as portrayed in the papers. Sharpe was driven nearly rabid by the reporters, who dogged his every movement and besieged his quarters morn, noon, and night. Bloodgood refused, flat-footed, to be "interviewed," and Armistead shut his mouth like a clam, thereby compelling some journalists to improvise the desired statements and to lay before the public a series of inventions infinitely more sensational than anything the interested parties could possibly have given, and, as sensation always sells, this was probably what both the press and the public wanted.

It was from the inspired columns of the *Palladium* that the colonel first learned that the cause of the whole trouble was "the presence at the post of a man recently dismissed in disgrace from the army, but who in defiance of law, regulations, and common decency was now con-

cealed in the quarters of Lieutenant Nelson, a former classmate. The man in question was, until his dismissal, a lieutenant in the artillery, but his peccadilloes, extending over a period of years, had culminated in a cowardly assault on a brother officer at Fort Pawnee," and Sharpe sent for Nelson and demanded the facts. Nelson unerringly gave them, and said his friend was prostrated still and the doctor forbade his being disturbed or seen, which was all there was to the assertion that he was concealed. The colonel felt, somehow, that Langdon's presence at the post was a thing he ought to object to, and he did. "See what an infernal bobbery it has kicked up," said he. "Now they'll be demanding an explanation from me at Washington, and what the devil am I to say? You ought to have consulted my wishes before harboring a man in Mr. Langdon's plight."

"I did not invite poor Langdon out here, colonel," answered Nelson. "Two of our men found him fainting and exhausted in town and mercifully brought him here. I put him to bed in my quarters as a matter of course, and if that's a military offence I'll stand any punishment a court-martial may inflict. As to Armistead and Langdon, beyond the fact that there is some deep feeling between them, I know

nothing. There is no likelihood of their meeting, and when Langdon is strong enough to move he will need no hint from head-quarters or anywhere else. He is making life a burden to me now with his importunities to be sent to Chicago at once. What with trying to keep him in and reporters out I'm about used up."

Then the colonel said something about reporters, which being interpreted, was the reverse of complimentary, and not altogether just, because, like soldiers, these hapless toilers have their orders and cannot but obey. They were sent to Sheridan to get something sensational,—“something to make the paper sell,” and the fellow that came back empty-handed—none of them did, of course—stood in danger of discharge. The colonel really wanted to know the nature of the telegram that called Dr. Armistead so suddenly to town. The senior surgeon, Lieutenant Nelson, and one or two others had intimated that it was not the coming of the telegram, but Langdon, that set him going. Investigation, however, developed the fact that a telegram really had been received and delivered to Dr. Armistead. The operator could not be required to disclose the nature of the same, it being a private despatch, yet the colonel thought he ought to know, if for no other reason than

to be able to set at rest the rumors at Armistead's expense, and before he had time to think it all over and decide with wisdom, as ill luck would have it, he met Armistead in front of headquarters and beckoned him aside.

"Dr. Armistead," said he, "in justice to yourself it might be well to let me see the despatch you received the other night. You may have heard that other motives have been assigned to your going so hurriedly to town."

"I have heard, sir," was the doctor's spirited rejoinder, "also of the inquiries of certain of your officers of the operator. In my State we shoot men who stoop to such practices. Up here you seem to encourage them."

The colonel flushed hotly. "Have a care, Dr. Armistead. Language like that has led to the loss of more than one commission. I do not resent your words as they deserve, because I know the strain you are under and the annoyance you—we all—have had. I repeat that it seems due to yourself to dispel this—uncertainty," and, uncertainly, the colonel paused.

"Then let me say here and now, Colonel Sharpe, that if you mean 'Show that telegram,' I decline. As for Mr. Langdon, after all that has been published and said, he has got to meet me the moment he is well enough."

The colonel's orderly, muffled to his ears in his heavy overcoat, stood within easy range, intently eying some object far out on the stormy lake, but as intently listening.

"Orderly," said the colonel, impatiently, "take these letters to Mrs. Sharpe and say I won't be home to luncheon, and go and get your dinner." Then, when the soldier was well beyond earshot, the colonel turned on the fiery young Virginian. "Dr. Armistead," said he, impressively, "you may judge for yourself as to the telegram, but for the present I have simply to warn you to keep your temper and—away from Mr. Langdon. There's to be no meeting between you two in or around this post. Understand that, and—good-day to you, sir."

This was four days after Langdon's arrival, and by another day the Chicago papers had reached Pawnee and served as fuel to the flame of excitement already in full blast. To begin with, Old Hurricane, Langdon's faithful valet and servant, had been bequeathed to the care of Rodney May and Woodrow; had been given a little room back of the main mess building and, in somebody's cast-off dress suit, appeared as butler one evening at dinner. A Virginia education had made him familiar with every detail of such duties, and his grizzled pate and

lined, pathetic face went far to equip him to look the character. To Langdon's friends among the boys it seemed most fitting that the lonely old negro, mourning for his beloved master, should be cared for by their number, but Langdon's friends were not too numerous now that he was some weeks gone from their midst, and Nathan, Torrance, and satellites of theirs had the floor. It pleased Mr. Torrance, one evening, to speak brutally to the old servitor and then contemptuously of his former employer, and when May and Woodrow heard of the shabby affair they hunted up Torrance and demanded the reasons for his outbreak. The particulars of that encounter never got out, but a small party of cronies first cut Torrance and then cut loose from the club. Taking Hurricane with them they set up housekeeping for themselves, and this new establishment was in smooth running order, very harmonious and companionable, when the Sheridan news was received, whereas there were still dissensions at "the mess." The married men had all club privileges, of course, but no seat at table. The fifteen or twenty bachelors who, thrice a day, had been accustomed to commune together over the board, had taken much comfort in Hurricane's colonial dignity of manner and consummate

knowledge of a butler's duty. They were annoyed that Torrance should have taken it upon himself to abuse a servitor who was in no wise in his pay or under his authority, but, having failed to pass the vote of censure proposed by May, Woodrow, and De Luc, or to take any measure whatever to insure their butler against further abuse, they had precipitated the secession of six of their choicest spirits, and, with the six, had lost Hurricane. When it was too late some of the main establishment thought they "ought to do something," for the six who seceded were gentlemen and, if one might judge from language and conduct, Torrance was not. Wealth, won with his lackadaisical wife, had made him arrogant, but nothing could make him popular. The membership of the officers' club included the entire commissioned list of the garrison, cavalry, artillery, and staff. "Cat," of course, was president, but Mrs. Cat had her objections to his giving much time to social enjoyment within its walls, and the doughty veteran who had led a dozen dashing charges during the great war and who bore the scars of more than one sharp scrimmage with the redskins on the frontier, was no match for his better half in domestic encounter. Mrs. Cat had convictions, one of them being that a married

man should eat and drink only in the presence and company of the partner of his joys and woes. This insured his getting only what was good for him. Cat, as a consequence, saw very little of the club. Its vice-president, an easy-going old soul, exercised no control, he professing to believe that such powers were vested only in the chief. Melville but rarely set foot within its doors. When he did, however, it was marvellous to note the effect. Altercation ceased, argument tempered, voices toned down and orders for drinks diminished to next to nothing. In its earlier stages the club had been likened by a witty and observant woman to the "Roaring Camp" immortalized by Bret Harte, and occupants of quarters contiguous to or within hail of its limits were loud and frequent in their complaints. "Roaring Camp" was still the name by which the many garrison wits, mostly women, referred to it, and its members had so far succumbed to the force of circumstances as to fall into the way of saying they were going to "Camp" when they went to the club. Taking it by and large, however, the Pawnee Club had been a fairly harmonious organization. If its cigars were not the best to be found in the army, its stories were not the worst, and as for the mess feature, Pawnee's table was said to be quite

the peer of that of Leavenworth or "the Point."

But the mess needed a head, the senior officer not having been provided with more than the outward and visible sign thereof. He was a veteran captain of cavalry, long left a widower. He presided with ponderous dignity at the board, but had neither weight in deliberation nor force in discipline. "The boys" overrode him completely, and when discussion became fierce or heated he lost all semblance of control. The secession of so many bright, brainy juniors, all battery officers, proved a sore blow. Other cliques speedily developed. There was an element among the cavalrymen in which Eric Langdon's case had excited profound sympathy, and the more these fellows saw and heard of Nathan and Torrance the less they liked them and the more they felt for Langdon. But the anti-Langdonites, if not actually in the majority, were most in evidence, for they, at least, had organization and energy. Conscious of the growing feeling for Langdon and against them, they were seeking every opportunity to heap further obloquy on his name. They turned up day after day with some new story at his expense, for the truth of which they declared some reliable person was ready to vouch, and, as

their hearers had no information on the subject, the most they could do was to look incredulous. It was one evening, late, when Nathan and Torrance had been holding forth at some length and most of the cavalry crowd had slipped away to the card- or billiard-room, that at last one of the troopers who had long feigned not to hear anything that was being said emerged from the screen of the morning paper and drawled,—

“Seems to me you fellows have to expend lots of ammunition killing a man you declare to be dead. If he’s the damned cad you say he is, how does it happen that Melville corresponds with him?”

“Melville’s too soft-hearted to refuse to answer his letters,” answered Torrance, impatiently. “They’re probably begging letters anyhow.”

“They’re not,” said the trooper, “’cause I’ve seen ’em. As to being soft-hearted, I was with Melville in that Modoc business when Squirt Tainter had to resign, and when he cut Jimmie Gannon dead. I’ll bet you what you like Melville would fire you, Nathan, quick as he did Tainter, or cut you, Torrance, dead as he did Gannon if you deserved it as they did. But *he* stands up for Langdon.”

“I’ve said before, *Captain Channing*,” replied

Nathan, with pronounced emphasis on the title, turning the color of his stripes and half-way round in his chair, "Major Melville does not know Langdon. As for Tainter, any man who played the damned coward as he did would have to expect court-martial, at least, and Melville let him off the public disgrace he deserved. He was a shame to the regiment. As for Gannon, there was a woman in that case and—others cut him as well as Melville."

"W—e—ll now, hold on, Nathan," drawled Channing, drawing his lean length from the depths of an easy-chair in which he was sprawled. "I was stationed at 'Frisco about that time and I know quite as much of the business as you do who happened to be in Europe on leave, as I remember when your regiment got into that campaign——"

"My battery wasn't in it!" interposed Nathan, hastily.

"And," continued Channing, placidly, "Tainter isn't the only man to find the perils of Indian fighting too much for his nerve. We had a case in my regiment and—there are others. As for cutting Gannon, it's true others did it, but not until after Melville set the example. If Langdon was half as bad as you make him out, Melville wouldn't be backing him for employ-

ment at this minute, and you wouldn't be taking such pains to prove your side of the case, which, by gad, isn't mine."

"All right," sneered Nathan, rising uneasily, and making for the door in evident discomfiture over Channing's pointed remarks. "I'm betting you and Melville will be wishing you had left bad enough alone before you are many months older, and I don't envy you if the colonel happens to hear of your taking up the cudgels for the man he court-martialed. Come on, Torrance!"

"No fear he won't hear," drawled Channing. "Non-conductors are scarce in *your* set, Nathan. Good-night to you—both."

That episode led to split number two in the mess. Channing's words were held by Nathan's few followers as "a slur on the artillery" and he was asked to withdraw them. He wouldn't. He said they applied only to Nathan's immediate circle, which included, to the best of his belief, only three, or possibly four, officers of artillery. The mess divided against itself, and this was the condition of affairs when the Chicago papers came, telling of the tremendous events at Sheridan. It so happened that Mrs. Torrance was giving a reception that afternoon, —that Mrs. Melville had "regretted" some days

previous, but that Miss Ethel Grahame, the very attractive young woman referred to as devoted to riding in an earlier chapter, had been induced, much against her will, to go in place of her aunt. There were many "points" to this girl, as the most *blasé* man in the batteries, Mr. Santley, had twice remarked, but later he had given it as his opinion that, for a girl who hadn't a penny she was too—superior, you know. Santley had been twice abroad, had a little money and about as little sense, had cast his lot with the Nathan contingent as more congenial and productive of dinners. Yet he had spent more evenings at Melville's than anywhere else in the garrison. Melville, always courteous to him but never communicative, could not have been the attraction, especially as the major had a way of withdrawing to his study, with certain of his officers, on several evenings in the week and working out problems in the War Game. Santley was no student. He hated books, but he loved a pretty face, and that Ethel Grahame's was pretty beyond peradventure not more than five women at Pawnee could be brought to deny even in sacred and secret confidences. Mrs. Melville was not Santley's attraction, for she spent the early evening hours with her children, as a rule, and considered Santley a milksop and

snob. Snob he was, as defined by Thackeray, but milksop?—that was still “not proven.” Santley was a dawdler in the parlor, but no dolt upon parade. He rode, shot, sparred, and danced well, and what he might do in the event of active service was yet to be determined. Now, Langdon had been Miss Grahame’s escort on three occasions in saddle before his arrest and court-martial, and then sharp weather set in. Miss Grahame, who had been “devoted to riding” in the early fall, seemed to lose her fondness for it when the November winds blew cold over the bald bluffs along the Pawnee. It was Miss Grahame on whom the duty of entertaining Mr. Santley generally devolved, and it was the conviction in Melville’s household that no better arrangement was desired by that gentleman. What the major and his wife only conjectured was that for Miss Grahame the arrangement was less charming, but she made no remonstrance. There was very much in Mr. Santley she did not fancy at all, but she would have been less than woman had she not seen that her half-formed aversion was anything but reciprocated. Few women worth the winning are destitute of coquetry, however diluted, and Ethel Grahame had found pleasure and interest in spite of herself in Mr. Santley’s visits, for she delighted in

puzzling, perplexing,—even in tormenting him. She had gone to two dances with him to one with Woodrow or May, and then refused to go with him to a third. He asked why. “Because you ask so far ahead,” was her placid reply.

“I thought the rule was ‘first come, first served,’” he said in sulky surprise.

“I know you did, and if that rule were universal no woman could be afforded a choice. She might be compelled to go through an entire season with the least desirable man in society. Now, *I* like variety.”

“You went riding three times hand running with Mr. Langdon,” complained the youth. “Did you refuse him the fourth?”

“The fourth never came, but if it had I should have gone. There is great difference between an exhilarating out-door ride and an indoor party. Besides—Mr. Langdon could teach so much.”

“Which I can’t do, I suppose you mean,” said he, disconsolately. Then with an upward glance, “Is he going to teach riding for a living, do you ’spose?”

The words were hardly spoken when he regretted them. Miss Grahame flushed hotly and the light in her eyes boded ill for Santley.

“I—I really beg your pardon,” he hastened

to say. "That was very clumsy of me, you know. I didn't mean—it was only in sport, you know."

They were walking along the broad gravel path towards the commanding officer's at the moment. The Torrances' gate was just ahead. Three or four women, joyously chatting and laughing, were entering. They nodded, with smiling significance, towards the approaching pair, thereby augmenting Miss Grahame's annoyance.

"Say I'm forgiven, Miss Grahame," pleaded Santley, hurriedly, "and that you will go with me to the Thanksgiving hop. I've got to go to stables now, you know. There won't be any men at the Torrances till after retreat. Indeed—I'm—I'm awfully sorry I vexed you," and to do Santley justice, he looked it.

She turned and faced him. "Mr. Santley," she said, "I knew very few officers till our coming here. It is the first garrison I ever visited. My uncle and two of his old comrades formed my ideas of what our soldiers were and should be, and Mr. Langdon seemed to be of the same calibre, as you artillerymen say. I never heard them sneer at a man in such misfortune as has fallen to him. Your having vexed me is a small matter. My ideals of the army have been de-

cidedly shaken, not by one, but by several of your associates. I thought officers were above such—pettiness.”

And now it was Santley's turn to redden. “If you stop to consider how Mr. Langdon's misconduct—misfortunes—reflect on the regiment, Miss Grahame, you may understand why we feel it so deeply, and, feeling it, it is no wonder we occasionally speak. If it's anything you—care about, of course I'm hoping he won't have to teach riding—or anything else.”

“Good-afternoon, Mr. Santley,” said she, for they had reached the open gate, and she desired no further words.

“But about the hop, Miss Grahame?”

“I shall take it under advisement until to-morrow,” was the mischievous and provoking answer, “with all the chances against acceptance. I doubt now if I go at all.”

But when Major Melville returned from stables he found his wife in deep concern. It was dark enough at that time to call for lights in many of the quarters, and the windows at Torrance's were brilliant. Some of the women folk had already sauntered home, others were still abroad, chatting in eager, subdued tones. Mrs. Melville met the major at the door and drew him into the parlor.

"What is this news about Mr. Langdon?" she asked, as soon as she had him safely cornered.

"That he is at Sheridan and has been ill, I gather," was Melville's calm reply.

"Now, I ask because Ethel came back all aflame with indignation and has gone to her room to bathe her eyes. Mrs. Nathan said publicly that Mr. Langdon had been picked up by the police, *drunk* in the gutter of a crowded street, and that the soldiers clubbed together, paid his fine, and took him out to Fort Sheridan."

"I have a letter from Nelson giving me full particulars," said Melville, in the same unruffled manner, as he gently drew his wife to a seat by his side. "There is no truth in the story of drunkenness or police. You remember Ryan who used to be in my battery? 'Twas he who found Langdon, fainting, and they took him to Sheridan as a matter of course."

"But Mrs. Nathan says Colonel Sharpe was *furious* at his being brought there, and has ordered him put off the post as soon as he can be moved, and the papers are full of stories about a duel. She says Dr. Armistead declared he would publicly insult and horsewhip Mr. Langdon if he showed his face in the garrison."

The major smiled. "Never mind what Mrs. Nathan or the newspapers say, dear," he answered, in the same gentle, reassuring tone. "Nelson tells me that there is some old trouble between this young doctor and Langdon, but that they have not met and are not likely to meet. Channing hopes to secure an opening for Langdon as soon as he is able to work.

"Oh, yes, and that reminds me, Mrs. Nathan said Mr. Langdon had the impudence to go to her own uncle, who is vice-president, or something, in the Chicago and Seattle Railway, and demand employment, saying he was an officer in her husband's battery here, and Mr. Whatever his name is—you remember him, he was here—just told him they had no use for such a character. Now, do you suppose that can be true?" And Mrs. Melville looked up at her stalwart husband as though the wisdom of the universe were centred in him.

"I dare say Langdon applied there, poor fellow!" said Melville, gravely, the deep brown eyes softening still more at thought of the rebuff the sad, heart-sick fellow probably met, if indeed it was to Mrs. Nathan's uncle to whom he applied. "But there are other roads open to Langdon that exact less and pay far more

than railroads, only Langdon always had a predilection for railway engineering and service. Captain Channing is writing to Langdon now and has written to an elder brother, who is general manager of the Seattle's greatest rival, the Missouri Valley. Now there is trouble on both roads and men are very much needed, so I think Langdon will be provided for in the near future. I hope Ethel did not allow herself to be much—disturbed?" And when the major finished in this half-interrogative way it was meant to imply that while he might be hopeful he was by no means confident. He had known Ethel, a beloved sister's only child, since her babyhood, and knew her to be fearless, resolute, and anything but politic. He was wondering, as he stroked with his one disengaged hand the heavy brown mustache, what Ethel might have said in reply to Mrs. Nathan.

But there was no immediate opportunity for inquiring. The papers that had deluged the post with Chicago's version of the scandals at Sheridan had reached Pawnee that day, some thirty hours old, and second in local interest were the details of the serious situation on some of the great transcontinental railways. Officials and operatives had come to the final clinch. An ultimatum had been prepared "in the in-

terests of Labor." If not acceded to by the managers within twenty-four hours not only the transcontinentals, complete, but the Seattle and Missouri Valley roads would be tied up forthwith.

Before Mrs. Melville could frame her reply to the major's tentative there came a step on the piazza, a ring at the hall-bell, and then Cat's voice was heard in animated converse with some companion. Melville himself opened the door to bid them enter,—the colonel and his silent adjutant.

"Melville, here's a go!" began the commanding officer, without preliminary of any kind. "I'm ordered to send a reliable officer at once to Omaha to act under special instructions that are to meet him there, and you're the most reliable man I have. Can you make the night train?"

"Easily, colonel."

"So be it, then. I'll have the orders made out at once."

Several of the battery officers went down to see their leader off. Channing, too, was there, and led the major aside a moment. "I've written direct to Langdon," he said, "and given him letters to my brother with instructions how to find him, he'll be somewhere out on the line

now, I suppose. The only question is,—will Langdon be well enough?"

Melville pondered a moment before he replied,—

"Nelson wrote three days ago that it might be a week,—that would be till Friday, say,—this is Wednesday night. I fancy he'll hardly be strong enough, Channing, but thank you all the same."

Yet when Friday evening came it brought a despatch for Channing that gave him keen anxiety.

"Letter for Langdon here. He disappeared during morning. No trace." Signed "Nelson."

CHAPTER V

NINETY miles west of the "Big Missouri" and in the heart of the thriving town of Brentwood the rival lines of the C. and S. and the C. and M. V., popularly known, respectively, as the "Seattle" and the "Big Horn," crossed each other and the beautiful stream that drained the valley. The Pawnees long ages ago had called it after the prairie-wolf, but their despoilers, the Sioux, rechristened it Red Water, declaring it so thick with the blood of their hereditary foes that it had lost all semblance of blue; and Red Water it remained in name, at least, though it speedily lost the sanguinary tint and outvied all the storied streams of Indian land in that it never sulked and sank out of sight in beds of quicksand, never turned into raging torrent and tore things out by the roots as did the mountain-born "Minnes" and "Wakpas" that streaked the lands of the Dakotas to the north, never failed to freeze over in clear, solid ice at the appropriate time in the early winter, and to bubble forth again, sparkling and smiling, in the early spring. Fed by innumerable springs and brooks from pine-crested

heights where the snow lay deep all winter long and only slowly melted for the northering sun, draining a broad, beautiful, and fertile valley through which it meandered in long, sweeping, graceful bends and "reaches," moving serenely, steadily, placidly, through mile after mile of fair and peaceful landscape, rarely ruffled by the gales that swept the uplands long, long leagues to the west, or stirred by the savage blizzards that tore through the Dakota wastes, it drew to its willow-shaded shores by hundreds the hardy settlers and pioneers,—the farmer, rancher, and herdsman. Brentwood became the market town and grew apace. Railways from St. Paul and St. Louis crawled, and from Chicago scrambled, thither, and before the Sioux were fairly out of the country and the settlers fairly in Brentwood the Red Water Valley was the objective-point of half a dozen corporations. Brentwood grew from market town to county-seat, to railway terminus (a bad time that!), to division station, with round-house and machine- and car-shops. Brentwood dammed the Red Water and began grinding its own wheat before Minneapolis reached for it. Brentwood jumped from a population of fifteen to fifteen thousand in less than ten years, and now the Seattle and the Big Horn had handsome stone "depot" buildings.

The St. Louis and Northwestern had graded to within ten miles of the town, and the Minneapolis and Southwestern had a spur that tapped mills, elevators, and factories, and a switch-engine that screamed defiance at those of the big transcontinentals. The "Seattle" was not built through to "The Sound" by any manner of means, and the "Big Horn," for which its rival was named, looked very little when viewed from the outermost stake. But the grain and cattle business was tremendous if "through passenger" was not. Chicago took all the wheat and corn and live-stock the Red Water Valley could spare and eagerly bid for more. But a bad time had come for the Seattle and Big Horn both. Long, long lines of grain and cattle-cars, especially cattle, stretched westward on both main line and sidings from Brentwood. The mercury had dropped to within a few degrees of zero. A thousand horned cattle and five times as many sheep and hogs were clamoring for food and water and couldn't get it, for a thousand angered men in the various shops and yards of the Seattle, and as many in the Big Horn, had sworn no wheel should turn and no hand should minister until "the Road" came to their terms. If the trains had been passenger-coaches and the passengers hungry and thirsty

women and children the rule would have been the same. The strikers proved that in a later and fiercer grapple, when the authority of even the United States was set at naught by the labor leader who established his head-quarters in Chicago and checked the commerce of the world. But this earlier insurrection against law and order was serious enough in all conscience. For twenty-four hours only the mail-trains had been allowed to leave the Chicago stations. For twenty-four hours east-bound passenger-trains had been side-tracked at far-away towns in the interior. Train crews were coaxed or driven from their posts. The few determined and devoted men who remained steadfast were assaulted and mobbed, and away out here at Brentwood the division shops poured forth an array of strikers, who, aided by gangs of tramps from all over the West and "toughs" from the Missouri River towns, were more than sufficient to bid defiance to a dozen sheriffs' posses, and to ditch a train-load of Pinkertons three days' march away. The National Guard were on duty in Chicago, and the governor of Nebraska had ordered out such militia as was then organized. The people of Dakota, just budding into twin star statehood, had appealed for federal troops, but at Brentwood the strikers had full sway.

Two companies of militia arriving to reënforce the local command found a few of the latter wandering disconsolately about in small squads and civilian dress, the laughing-stock of the town, the leaders of the strike having early and thoughtfully possessed themselves of their arms, armory, and uniforms. Received with ironical cheers, the new-comers sought to communicate with the sheriff as their instructions required. Polite and sympathetic citizens bade them remain aboard the train and they would be switched over into the yards of the Seattle, where the sheriff was reported holding out as best he could. They remained, were switched as promised not only to but beyond the yards—forty miles beyond, in fact—at breathless speed, and bidden to camp there until they were hauled back and to live meantime on the country. For over twenty-four hours the strikers had things all their own way and were jubilant. Then came the backward sweep of the tide. A wire from the south announced that regulars were in possession at Omaha, Council Bluffs, and Sioux City, and that a little battalion was on its way to the relief of Brentwood, and still the starving and imprisoned live-stock baa'ed, bellowed, and squealed for food and water. Still passenger traffic was at a stand. The division superin-

tendent and his assistants were powerless. Though they manned engines, threw switches, and "braked" cars, the rails were soaped, the boilers foamed, and their engines were "killed" under their very noses,—all without violence of either word or deed. The strikers liked their division chief and hated to be at odds with him now. So long as only railway hands were permitted about the yards or stock-trains there had been no wanton destruction of property, but to such scenes ever flock the blackguard element of the community, and the news that troops were coming proved an excuse for desperate deeds. That night the wintry sky above the Red Water reflected the glare of a mile of flame. Cars, grain-sheds, and an elevator went up in smoke. There was a barbecue where one section of a cattle-train could not be rescued and run out in time. All this, telegraphed to Chicago and the officials scattered over the length of the road, called for strenuous action. The wires hummed with appeals and orders, and a calm, placid man, a dark brown-eyed man, who looked the soldier in spite of civilian dress, drove into Brentwood at dawn the following day, sent certain telegrams to Eastern points and one to old Fort Pawnee far away to the south, got a light breakfast and another buggy at the hotel and drove

out to the yards. When he returned, an hour before noon, the eyes of many citizens followed him in eager curiosity. The first of the regulars was here. At two o'clock the news was whispered about the streets that a big force of strikers had gone down to the narrows of the valley where the Red Water, turning from the rectitude of its ways, lashed and foamed between rocky bluffs and heights, and the rival lines, "Seattle" and "Big Horn," twisted and turned for some twenty miles not four hundred yards apart. A troop-train had left Omaha bent on forcing a way to Brentwood, and in desperation the strike leaders had determined to topple it into the stream.

It was but a few minutes after two when, through the Western Union, the stranger received the following despatch:

MAJOR MELVILLE, U. S. A., Brentwood.

Nathan reports serious obstacles. Strikers opposing movement of train every mile. He has only one hundred men. Four companies State militia go out by M. V. at once and may get first to Red Water Gorge. The two commands should act in concert."

(Signed)

"CROOK."

The major replaced the despatch in its envelope, stowed the packet in an inner pocket, and walked slowly from the office into the slanting

sunshine without. The street was filled with men sauntering up and down or gathered in knots at the corners. It was a still wintry afternoon, though but little snow as yet had fallen east of the mountains. Melville noted that all eyes were on him, but not in open hostility. Whatever the hands might have in store for the officials of the road or for train-loads of troops, their rancor took no shape against a single man, apparently, even actually, unarmed. Melville carried neither flask nor pistol. He was reflecting on the miscarriage of the plans for the concentration of troops so far as Brentwood was concerned, and wondering by what evil chance Nathan had been chosen to command the detachment ordered thither from the south. It was odd to think of light artillerymen being so employed at any time, but these were the economical days. Companies, batteries, and "troops" could rarely muster more than thirty men for duty. Pawnee's garrison had been split up and sent to three or four important points, and, being senior in date of commission to the two cavalry captains sent with it, Nathan had been given the lead, and Nathan looked anything but blissful when old Cat ordered him off. "Leave enough men to care for your barracks, stables, and gun-sheds," said he. "Draw thirty

carbines from the cavalry, let your men leave their sabres and go with carbine and revolver, then you'll be uniform with the troopers." Cat thought that when a soldier was uniform with a trooper he couldn't be better off; Nathan thought he couldn't be worse. Next to an Indian Nathan hated a mob. Two hours from the time the orders reached him the command was ready to go, but not so Nathan. Two days from the time they started they were still two days' march from Brentwood, and their train met no detention whatever until it got well into northern Nebraska. Then it was found so easy to induce the commanding officer to believe that the track was all torn up just ahead or that strikers had blown up or burned down bridges, that sympathizers with the wage-workers kept up the practice at every station, and Nathan was sending despatch after despatch to Omaha, the tidings of which, when it all came to be investigated, proved utterly untrue as the general held them to be at the time, and naturally he grew indignant and nervous. While most of the troops had been hurried to Chicago and the Mississippi crossings, the garrisons west of Omaha had been ordered to rendezvous there or go direct to other designated points in the Northwest. Brentwood was making no great trouble

was the first report. Two or three companies of State militia were all that was needed, according to the original views of the authorities, and they were sent there with the result that jeering telegrams came back to the magnates, the marshals, and the military authorities called into action. All on a sudden people woke up to the realization that Brentwood was a railroad town and the whole community practically in sympathy with the operatives. All of a sudden the news came flashing over the wires that Captain Nathan with one hundred men from Fort Pawnee had been stoned and compelled to retire when his command was detained at Gunnison's, and though officers and men declared their readiness to push ahead afoot, their cautious captain forbade any man to push a foot ahead until he could again communicate by wire with department head-quarters.

"What did I tell you!" growled a veteran Indian fighter, now taking his first turn of any consequence against the mob. "You've heard the old saying, 'An army of sheep led by a lion can whip an army of lions led by a sheep,' and that's what's side-tracked now at Gunnison."

And at the very moment that Nathan was holding back there, alarmed and irresolute, with

a hundred fighting men ready for any duty and chafing at their commander's inaction, another troop-train came steaming into the station. Two alert, clear-eyed, sturdy men in civilian dress sprang from the engine-cab, and at sight of the foremost the men who had so easily daunted the commanding officer of the first train seemed to slink away. He dove into the telegraph-office, spent a few minutes in sending and receiving despatches, and in that few minutes the platform swarmed with a laughing, shouting, shoving, altogether hilarious crowd of young fellows in loose flapping blue blouses and greatcoats, eagerly seeking something—anything to eat or drink. Aboard the first train, far up ahead, was grim silence; not a soldier showed himself outside the cars. Orders were orders. Around this second train it seemed as though, officers and men in a bunch, the battalion of militia had turned out for a frolic. It didn't last long. A grizzled, sharp-featured little man in a major's uniform swung off the rearmost car and came up the track, three ties to the stride, his eyes snapping. So were his words when he got to the platform. He wasted none till within hail. "Captain Clark, get your men aboard your car instantly. Captain Geisenheimer, this is the second time I've spoken to

you. Go to the rear car in arrest! Lieutenant Meinecke, take command of the company and the company to the car. I told you supper would be ready for all hands at five o'clock. It's only four. Back to the train every mother's son of you! Back!" And somewhat crestfallen, somewhat awed and abashed, yet realizing that the little major "meant business," back they went, still keeping up the semblance of jocularity by horseplay and racing. Then out came the first of the newly-arrived civilians, followed by the younger,—a silent man.

"All serene for ten miles anyhow, major, but you might put four of your best men on the pilot and tender. We will be there, too. All right, Mac!" he sung out to the engineer. "We push ahead as soon as we get this gang aboard. Look at the regulars' train up the track. They're not straggling all over creation!"

"No, and they ain't gittin' ahead any too fast either," snickered the station agent. "It's taken 'em two hours to come twenty miles, and now the cap's waitin' for orders."

"Then, by gad, that gives us the right of way and the lead!" was the gleeful answer. "We go on at once. How's that for high, major? Better come forward to the baggage-car."

Then pandemonium broke loose on the rear

troop-train. The word went from car to car like wild fire that the regulars were side-tracked ahead and "the boys," as they called themselves, would have the lead. From every door and window one head at least and sometimes two protruded as the engine gathered way, and presently rolled past the heavier but shorter train at the water-tank. A chorus of yells of rejoicing, chaff, and fun arose from the throats of three hundred lively young Westerners on their first campaign. Silent, sombre faces looked out at them from the other windows, though occasionally some light-hearted Irishman would fling back a laughing answer. Three officers stood on the rear platform of the regular train intently eying the on-coming engine. The Guardsmen on the pilot were hanging to their rifles with one hand and the rail with the other. The tender seemed bristling with blue-coats. The keen, bright-eyed face of the railway official was peering forth from the fireman's side of the cab, and he waved his hand to the trio. None knew him, but all looked and saw, peering over his shoulder, another face. It was only an instant's glimpse, but a flash of recognition leaped into the eyes of the nearest. He leaned forward from the step and gazed after them as they rushed by, regardless of the jocular hails of the

crowd in the cars. Then as the engine was shut from view, drew back on the platform once more.

“Who did I see?” he repeated, in reply to a question asked by Mr. Torrance. “Eric Langdon—or his ghost!”

CHAPTER VI

MIDWAY up the Red Water Gorge and ten miles southeast of Brentwood there comes tumbling and foaming down from the north a stream that is little more than a big brook eight months of the year, but is advertised all the year round as one of the scenic attractions of the "Seattle" road, much to the disgust of the general passenger and ticket agent of the "Big Horn," whose right of way is, in his opinion, twice invaded, first by the stream itself and then by the Seattle. Following the north bank of the Red Water the Big Horn had to encounter all the engineering difficulty of laying out a stable roadway across the mouth of this little tributary that, in the months of melting snows, became a boiling torrent, and the expense of constructing a massive bridge, while the spectacular effect was lost on its passengers because that right of way was scooped out at the base of steep rocky cliffs that shut entirely the view of the cascade and rapids until the car was directly under them and was then too close to get the best effect. Whereas from the opposite bank the passengers of the "Seattle" line, sweeping round a fine curve,

concave to the north, were treated to a capital view not only of the foaming, spray-tossing little cataract and the leaping rapids back of and above the Big Horn bridge, but of the fine bridge itself and the really magnificent gorge of the Red Water between the lines. Big Horn people thought it rough that the "Seattle" should so profit by what was practically their property. Some of the directors advocated boarding up the whole side of their steel truss, thus hiding the sight from the Seattle's eyes. But, said others, that would spoil it for our own patrons, besides making it dangerous for the bridge, for whenever a blizzard did sweep from the north—a rare occurrence near Brentwood—it came for all it was worth down that selfsame cross-cut gulch and beat in fury against the bridge at its foot. The massive stone piers were of double strength, and the stanch truss of tempered steel, that would stand any vertical strain the possibilities of railroading could heap upon it, had twice been perceptibly shifted by this lateral pressure. It was for this reason that a siding had been let into the bank for a quarter of a mile west of the bridge and a train of flat cars, heavily laden with railway iron, was kept there until certain guys and anchors could be made and set and the bridge stiffened laterally,—

a long operation. The object was to run those cars out on the bridge, set the brakes, and by this vast increase of weight so add to its stability as to bid defiance when the elements threatened. The repairs had been made and that auxiliary train removed before the management was called on to resist a storm of far greater magnitude and very different character. But the siding was still there. "It may come in handy some day," said the division superintendent, and the day appeared to have come. Old hands minded them of that old train, and some flats cars were "loaded up." (The American is never satisfied with the powers of his own verbs, to add, to load, to open, to saddle, and others of that ilk; he must, as he conceives, strengthen each by the superposition of "up," despite the fact that when correctly done there is no difference in the result of adding up or adding down. The school-boy still talks of adding up a column, the section boss "loads up" his teams, the railway "opens up" the new region, the trooper "saddles up" his steed, and the newspaper sanctions and follows the example.) Old hands knew it wouldn't do to hinder the mail-trains, so the bridge was not destroyed or even blocked against them, but on the rumor that troops were coming conservative fellows among the strikers ran

those iron-laden cars down grade to the siding, and there held them in readiness to be shoved out on the bridge the moment it was known the dreaded train had started from Gunnison, twenty miles to the east. One by one the heavy cars were then shoved across the bridge until the east approach and the span itself were covered. Then the more determined took things in their own hands, also picks, crow-bars, and shovels, and so undermined the track at a point some twenty yards west of the bridge foundation that, should the troops succeed in reaching the bridge and then attempt to move the obstructing flats westward out of the way, their weight would break through the weakened road-bed and pile up a barricade of tangled rails and ruined flat cars that, without damage to either engine or troop-train, would effectually block their passage, since men and tools and the wrecking-train would be needed to clear the track, and as matters stood on this 28th day of November these were not to be had.

And now at four-thirty in the wintry gloaming, silent save for occasional muttering, shivering a bit from mingled cold and excitement, a hundred or more of the hands, backed by twice their number of "toughs" and tramps, were gathered about the bluffs at "Bridge Siding,"

listening with all their ears for the first sound of the coming train. The rush of the Red Water over its rocky bed in the gorge below was the only sound that steadily bore upon the ear. Some few of the men, panting not a little, were laboring up the steep with hats or hands full of rocks. Over on the opposite—the southern—shore, the concave curve of the “Seattle,” was lined for a third of a mile with sympathizing operatives of the rival road, and for a time shouts of encouragement to each other and defiance to the management had echoed from bank to bank. Now, however, the gravity of the situation weighed upon the leaders, and, in the mournful twilight, the consciousness that they were “up agin the Government,” as several expressed it, caused some of the older men, who had gone through a harder tussle to utter defeat in '77, to draw aside and confer together in cautious tones. From mere bravado an uncouth-looking fellow began climbing the telegraph-pole west of the bridge, and the applause of certain among the tramp element, at other times the natural enemy of the train hands, attracted the attention of the leaders on the bluff. Instantly the query was bellowed from above,—

“Hold on! What 'n 'ell are you at?”

“Cuttin’ de wire, of course,” was the shouted

answer, and an unkempt face peered upward through the dim twilight.

"Let it alone, you damfool! *We're* runnin' the telegraph," and a down spinning "donick," sent by no reluctant hand, skimmed so close to the fuzzy head that, amid jeers of derision now, the would-be wire-clipper slid back to earth and skulked in among his cronies in the shadow of the bluff.

Barely two hundred yards away eastward across the deep rocky gulch two men, muffled in overcoats and fur caps, had just alighted from a buggy. One, standing at the horse's head, nodded appreciatively.

"Hear that, major?" he asked. "They've not lost their senses anyhow. I'll join you quick as I have blanketed and tethered the horse."

Silently the other bowed and, still standing at the edge of the little patch of firs that crowned the height, took from his pocket a small binocular, carefully studied the groups across the gulch to the west and then swept the line of the "Seattle" across the Red Water. Those on level with himself were in black silhouette against the pallid western sky. Those down across the Red Water were but dimly visible, for the sun was now behind a bank of cloud at the horizon and it was nearly five o'clock. Voices and jeers,

rising from the foot of the bluff where ran the line of the "Big Horn," told that many men were still there, but they could not be distinguished. Observant of his duty, Melville had notified the sheriff of the new complication, and together they had driven out of Brentwood by a northeastern road until well away from town, and then, taking the first turn to the east, had swept round over the hard, smooth prairie highways and had finally come down along the east bank of the brook well out of sight of the strikers at the bridge, reaching their lookout in good time and without detection. Further tidings had come before their start to the effect that Mr. Channing, the energetic manager, was aboard the train bearing the militia boys. This could only mean that the situation to the east of the Missouri was now so far improved that the keenest officials were giving their main effort to the west. Even before the major had completed his calm, methodical survey of the situation he was rejoined by the sheriff. It was then so near darkness that the stars were peeping in the eastward sky, and over across the rushing Red Water the glow of a little fire started by some of the "Seattle" crowd, lighted the rocky face of the railway cut and threw a gleam upon the waters.

And still no sign of the expected train! "Feeling her way," said the sheriff. "Dasn't take any chances!" A spike or two withdrawn, a fish-plate removed on any one of the half-dozen sharp curves along the gorge, would shoot the engine over the bank and into the boiling waters, with car after car pitching atop of it. "Reckon 'twill be another hour before it gets here!" concluded he.

Melville made no reply. He was watching a little light swaying like the lantern of a train-hand over on the southern shore and high up on a projecting point half a mile to the southeast. A moment earlier no light was there. Now it was swinging like a pendulum fire-fly, swiftly to and fro. There was instant excitement among the strikers across the Red Water and over against them where the Big Horn leaders seemed to have gathered. "Comin' sure as death!" whispered the sheriff, and together he and the major strode swiftly to the edge of the cliff overlooking the single track at its base.

Away down the Red Water a faint rumble and the pant of laboring engine could just be heard above the rush of the stream, and presently the edge of a glowing disk came steadily into view, then the full glare of a headlight,

which pointed a moment or two towards the opposite shore, swung across the seething rapids, dove into and under the bluff on the north side and disappeared from view. Behind it, snake-like, trailed the dim line of glowworm lights of the troop-cars, and then they, too, were swallowed up in darkness.

"Runnin' keerful," muttered the sheriff. "They know 'nuff not to come head on and full speed. She'll pull up somewhere down here and send forward to smell the bridge."

In silence and suspense they waited. All voices were hushed along the rocky banks. For a few minutes even the panting of the engine could not be heard as the train burrowed through a deep cutting. Then, louder, clearer, nearer than before, it sounded on the night, and a confused murmur of voices rose along the steeps. Angered and desperate as they were, few of the railway men could bear the thought of that train, freighted with human life, rushing on to destruction. A light as of a lantern shot suddenly into view on the opposite bank. Somebody at the same instant, lantern swinging, darted down the bluff on the "Big Horn" side. A howl of rebuke and menace rose from the gang of tramps; a volley of stones and coal-chunks shattered the glass and stunned the bearer, and

then, almost as though in relief and rejoicing, a shout went up across the stream from which side the train was now in plain view. Above the mingled roar of waters and voices, sharp and clear could be heard the hiss of escaping steam. The engineer had shut off. The long train was slowing down, and presently, four hundred yards away from the bridge, it settled to a crawl and soon came to full stop. Bending over the brink, Melville and the sheriff could see some half a dozen lanterns dancing briskly up the curving track and presently clustered about a single spot. They had come upon the east end of the obstructing cars. Then the sheriff's voice was heard on the gathering night.

"Below there! Can you hear me distinctly?"

"Ay, ay!" was the answer, after a moment's delay.

"Then don't attempt to send men across yet. There's a mob waiting there. Major Melville wants to see the gentleman in charge."

Silence one moment and then uprose a voice from below at sound of which Melville perceptibly started and bent more eagerly forward. It rang out on the night deep and resonant, in marked contrast to the "whang" of the Westerner's official tone.

"Who are you?"

"Hawkins, sheriff of Brentwood County," piped the answer.

A moment's pause, then, "All right. Mr. Channing will be up there presently."

Ten minutes later the manager and Major Melville had clasped hands on the bluff and four men were gathered in consultation.

"You've got Langdon with you," were almost the first words Melville spoke. "I knew the voice at once."

"Yes, and he's a trump. Helped us more'n I can tell you in the week he's been with me. Damn those lunatics! They're firing rocks at the bridge now. D'ye hear 'em? And I've got to get on to Brentwood and save the rest of that stock."

Ten minutes of counsel followed. The veteran militia major was for leading his men straight across on top of the iron cars,—they could not step from beam to beam in the darkness. There were other reasons besides this that caused Melville gravely to shake his head. In the glare of bonfires started by the tramps up the track and well back on the westward bluff dark groups of the strikers could be seen in excited conference. Others still were clustered a few yards west of the bridge, and the gleam of pick and shovel could be faintly seen.

"Cutting out under the tracks," said Channing between his set teeth. "I expected that. But, we'll show 'em!"

Another quarter hour of silent preparation. Then, panting a little from the exertion of the climb, two of the four companies were lined up along the bluff facing the position of the strikers across the gulch. The other two, under command of the major, knelt in the darkness on both sides of the track and close to the bridge. The engine, detached from the passenger-car, ran quickly forward and, amid shouts of excitement not unmingled with warning, coupled to the train of flats. Then arose yells of glee, defiance, and delight from the dense groups of tramps and strikers on the northern shore. There was a rush away from the track and yells of "Look out! Stand from under! She's coming!" followed almost instantly by cries of chagrin and baffled hate. Slowly at first the massive train began to move, but, instead of the sound of bang and bump that told of a powerful shove, there rose a quick series of ringing, metallic jerks, at sound of which the leaders gazed an instant at each other in dismay, then led a rush for the bridge. Too late! Channing had outwitted them, and instead of shoving the train into the trap was drawing it

to safety on the eastern side. Follow they dare not. There were two minutes of pandemonium, gradually dying away to silence, and then from across the deep ravine a voice they never forgot rang out, clear, deep and powerful,—

“Stand clear across there! We cover you with three hundred ball cartridges. Our workmen must cross the bridge and repair that track. If you give them as much as a shot or a stone, I order fire!”

CHAPTER VII

LATE that wintry night there steamed into Brentwood a train laden with three hundred State soldiery, who in silent array left the cars somewhere in the suburbs, thereby disappointing a big throng awaiting them at the station, marched rapidly under experienced guides to the armory of the local company, gave the mob guardians thereof the alternative of surrendering at once or being blown into flinders in less than five minutes, whereupon, as described in the local press, "there was a squealing and a scattering." Thence they bore the recaptured arms to the "Big Horn" round-house, and despatched an engine with a strong guard up the "Seattle" road to run back the exiles still "living on the country" forty miles away, and before long Melville had seven companies of militia ready to do anything under such cool-headed, accomplished leadership. The strikers for a time seemed bewildered by the coming of the troop-train and the return of certain weary stragglers of the band that set forth so boastfully the previous day,—all with tales of treachery on part of their fellows and tremendous odds

on part of the despised militia,—“militia with regulars to officer them,”—and there was ground for the statement, for Melville had hailed with keen though repressed delight the coming of the peppery little major, a veteran of the civil war, and of Langdon, who, though in civilian dress, had been “spotted for a soldier” even before they got to Gunnison. Ball cartridges had been issued to Captain Linkenfelder’s men as they stood in the depot at Missouri Junction awaiting the coming of a train bearing two companies from the south, and then came a funny thing. Linkenfelder could have shown them all about “loading in nine times” as they did in the war days, but this was a new company, he was an old officer, and the manual *minus* the loadings and firings was all he had yet taught them of the new breech-loader when came the call to arms. Mr. Channing, impatiently pacing the platform and reading despatch after despatch and occasionally dictating an answer to his new and silent secretary, presently saw that Langdon’s attention was wandering, and looked at him inquiringly.

“Those men have never been taught to load and fire,” said Langdon, “and their captain doesn’t know how. There’ll be trouble if they get into a snarl with rioters.”

"Then for God's sake *you* show them! Here, Captain Linkenfelder," he continued, impetuously, "my friend is a West Point officer. Let him help you there." Linkenfelder knew Channing well, as who along the line did not. He wiped his brow and tried to look pleased as he explained that they hadn't been drilling long. But in five minutes Langdon had the eight non-commissioned officers present in a squad, the rest of the company eagerly surrounding and looking on. In twenty minutes they had "got the hang" of the most important parts. In an hour, when the other train came sweeping in, he had the whole company in line practising "fire by company," "fire by rank," "fire by file," and never in a dozen drills had the "Junction Light Guard" learned as much as they had that day. "That fellow's a dandy drill-master," was the verdict, and the fame of the exploit and the praise of this unknown soldier had gone through the train before ever it reached the bridge. Next morning when Company "G" was told off for a possibly hazardous piece of duty and its captain was found to be still in arrest and "sulking in his tent," a committee went to the peppery little major with the gray mustache and blinking eyes, not, as might have been expected, to ask "cap's" release, but to say that

"the boys want a man who is way up in the biz, if there's any fighting to be done, and can't that West Point fellow take command?" "Will you do it?" asked the little major of Langdon. "Will you do it?" echoed Channing, and away went Eric across a maze of tracks, seventy strapping young fellows striding confidently after him, rejoicing in the ring and power of his word of command. An hour later they stood confronting a furious mob ten times their number, hurling bricks and billingsgate and foul abuse. At the point of the bayonet they had cleared the "Big Horn" shops of strikers, driven them into the open yards and the street beyond, and opened a passage for a train of cattle-cars.

But by this time, noting that most of Melville's forces were afar up the tracks rescuing cattle-trains, from every direction tramps, toughs, and the desperadoes among the strikers dropped the devilment they happened to be engaged in and came howling to reënforce the expelled gang. Only twenty yards away, just outside and along picket-fence they crowded, clamoring, cursing, brandishing weapons and hurling missiles, but these latter, having to be hurled high, generally fell short. Many among Langdon's new command were lads whose "nerve" would long since

have fled but for their leader's placid unconcern. He had backed them, as it were, up against the brown wooden walls of the freight-house, and then stood coolly forth ten feet in front of them, facing the raging throng without, sometimes quietly smiling as though he enjoyed the situation, sometimes slowly pacing up and down. At last as the clamor increased it became evident that the mob was bent on a dash at the office building to their right, standing alone opposite the great wooden gates,—gates which gave directly on the buildings containing the most valuable local properties of the "Big Horn" road excepting possibly the locomotives in the round-house. It was a moment of tense excitement. No man in the little band of defenders could estimate the extent of damage that would unquestionably result if that maddened throng broke through. It seemed as though by this time all the devilment of the disaffected was concentrated here at one spot, for the mob was vastly increased in size, and the jeers, howls, and curses were now continuous. Small wonder that many a young State "Guardsmen" in the little command felt a nervous thrill as he gazed at the host of semisavage faces peering in between the brown slats and listened to the hideous threats of the leaders. "We'll have your heart's blood,

you liveried dogs! We'll larn you tin soldiers a lesson! Burn down the fence! Kill the murdering hounds! Cut their throats!" were expurgated samples of the yells. But still the company stood at ordered arms and "at ease," for Langdon continued his cool promenade along the front, calmly eying the howling mob, keeping wary watch upon the fence and gate, but ever and anon glancing up the yards in search of support or reënforcement, for, to all outward appearance the coolest, most unconcerned person on the ground, his heart was filled with grave anxiety. His was by long odds the most critical position of any man, soldier or civilian, that day in all Nebraska.

For, now that he had time to face the facts and consider the position in all its bearings, he realized that he had no authority whatever in law or fact to enable him to discharge the grave duties of his position,—not so much as a commission in the State troops, not even a warrant as a deputy-sheriff. If the mob charged and, to defend the lives of these men, he was compelled to order them to fire, an indictment for murder would doubtless lie at his door. It is one thing to do a man's whole duty with the law behind him; it is another to stand and face a thousand voters and realize that every drop of blood that

might be shed on either side would, in the event of success or failure, be charged up to him. And still he never seemed disturbed. Speaking of it the following day, the lieutenants and certain of the brainier members of the command declared that what gave them their feeling of confidence and resolution was the utter nonchalance of their new commander.

But Langdon's heart beat quick when, just as it seemed probable that neck or nothing he should have to face the situation and fight, he caught sight of Channing with the sheriff and a brace of deputies coming towards him on the run. The crowd having concentrated here it was possible for the officials now to leave other threatened points. He strolled, as it were, with almost exaggerated quiet, to the right flank of his men to meet them. The mob redoubled its screams of defiance.

"Major Melville wants to know how you're getting along," panted Channing, as he hastened up, red-faced, anxious, but plucky.

"Well, you see for yourself," said Eric, with a nod of his head towards the fence. "Those fellows mean to burst through in a minute or two."

"Can't you scare 'em?—fire a volley over

their heads?" puffed the sheriff, eager and willing but utterly inexperienced.

"That's murder," was the cool reply. "A mob gains tenfold in daring and devilment when it sees you're afraid to fire anything but blanks. You'll simply have to kill fifty then where five would have sufficed in the first place. No, sir. Ball cartridge or nothing. And here's another point. I'm not an officer either of the troops or of the law." And now Eric had to raise his voice above the outer clamor. "I can give the necessary commands and at the proper instant, and I can drive those howlers back in one volley if they attempt to force the gates, but *you*, Mr. Sheriff, must stand by my side and assume responsibility, otherwise a week from now you'll be around with a warrant for my arrest."

"My God! I can't!" said the civil official, wiping the sweat from his brow, despite the cold wind from the westward prairie. He gazed almost fearfully along that surging fence line. It resembled by this time nothing so much as one continuous cage of snarling, roaring beasts. It was plain the poor fellow was losing his nerve. "Me and my family couldn't live in this community another week. Can't you say something to them, Mr. Channing?" Like many another civil official, the sheriff was realizing that it was quite

one thing to tackle a lot of tramps friendless and desperate as they were down at Bridge Siding; it was quite another to think of letting drive a deadly volley into the breasts of a mob that might contain friends and fellow-citizens and that would be sure to turn to in retaliation and possibly murder his own beloved ones. Small wonder the sheriff hesitated!

"Too late to talk!" shouted Channing, impatiently. "Besides, there isn't one sane railroad man in twenty in that lot. They're toughs from every town along the Big Muddy, and, by God, they'll sack these yards before the regulars can get here unless you can stop it, Langdon. That infernal 'Seattle' train ought to have been in long ago, but it may get here inside of an hour, and their general manager's just behind 'em on a special. What can you do?" And Channing set his stern jaw and glared at the crowd, fight, almost fury, in his blazing eyes, then turned back to Langdon. Before the latter could answer there came a scream from the sheriff.

"Look! Sledge-hammers, by God!" he cried, pointing to the gate, already shaken by the furious heaving of the throng.

"Then there's only one thing to do," answered Langdon, his face very pale, but his eyes

aflame. "Out of the way, please, Mr. Sheriff." And thus dismissing and disposing of that now useless functionary, he stepped quickly back to the front of his men. Even in that supreme moment he was counting the chances of every move. He had faced rioters before and knew how vital it was that every movement of the troops should be machine-like and precise. He remembered the howls of delight and derision with which a mob in Brooklyn had hailed the break-up of a battalion whose commander meant "Fours left" when he ordered "Fours right." The space was confined. Numbers were possibly forgotten already. It might flurry his untried men to essay two wheels by fours with only a few paces' march between. Moreover, *here* he could make them hear him distinctly. In front of the gates, thirty paces away, it might be impossible. All this passed through his mind with the quickness of thought.

"Listen to me carefully, now, men," he spoke in his clear, animated tone, every word cutting through the clamor so as to be distinctly heard by these, his young soldiers, standing grave-faced, and, some of them it was evident, quivering, before him, while, on the other hand, at his back and beyond the fence the uproar among the rioters made his voice inaudible. "I shall face

you to the right, march opposite the gate, then face you to the front again. Now, watch me well. I shall go to the gates, say a few words to those fellows, then step back and order you to load, and that means load with cartridges. Obey coolly. Take your time. But keep your hammers down at half-cock and *don't let a finger touch the trigger!* Quietly now," he added. Then, according to the tactics of the day, Langdon gave the order to carry arms; paused to see it thoroughly understood; then "Right face," which was done to a man without a flaw; then "Forward, march!" at which, to the accompaniment of redoubled yells and some few half-bricks that came hurtling over the fence, but fell short, the company moved off. "Short step in front," he warned the guide, so that his men should not become spread out or, like novices, trip over one another's heels. And so, in very commendable order, and in another moment, he had his men opposite the point of danger, then rang out the order "Company, halt!" faced them to the front once more, and there they stood at carried arms, silent, awed, but utterly subordinate, and, despite the fury of abuse and denunciation which greeted their move, looking straight into the faces of the raging mob, but with both ears attent and one eye on

their cool-headed commander. He smiled at them a moment. "Why, you fellows are steady enough for veterans," he said. And with his own heart thumping fast, he placidly turned again and with one calm glance at the surging scene before him, and purposely leaving his men at the carry, he walked quietly forward, Channing and the sheriff away to the rear looking breathlessly on.

Barely sixty feet interposed between his men and the mob, as, all alone, he sauntered down to the gates. In spite of themselves the cursing ringleaders, the brawny yielders of sledge and crow, dropped blasphemy and bars to listen. They saw he had something to say and curiosity prevailed. That white-faced, gray-eyed "cuss" had nerve and grit certainly, and seemed profoundly *unmoved* by their uproar. What they heard was not to their liking, but hear it they had to, for he lifted up his voice so that it reached some hundred ears, and yet his words were as calm, deliberate, passionless, as he himself might prove merciless. He spoke as though it were a matter of utter indifference to him whether they burst through and "got it" or stayed without and were spared.

"You seem bent on breaking in," the clear tones rang out over the murmur and mutter

close at hand,—the tumult at the distance. “Now, understand. If these gates fly open, the instant you attempt to enter you get a volley in the face!”

Then slowly, calmly, placidly as before, he turned about, walked back half-way, only ten steps or so, and there, first glancing along his waiting line to insure their readiness and close attention, in clear, sharp, commanding tone, with a distinct pause after every word so that even the mob could hear, gave the order,—

“With—ball—cartridges—Load!”

Ten seconds more and the silent seventy stood in the position preliminary to “ready,” the brown barrels sloping to the front, the muzzles chin-high, every eye fixed upon the gate in stern, calm determination, the ranks inspired by the soldier commander’s intrepid and resolute bearing; seventy men in uniform obeying to the letter the will of that one soldier in civilian dress; and then, once more in front of the centre, Langdon calmly faced the hard-breathing, half-paralyzed mob without and dropped on his right knee. The act spoke for itself. From that position, instead of in rear of the line, he meant to give the word, and the death-dealing volley would flash into their faces—over his head.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT was a memorable day in railway circles all over the West, but especially so in Nebraska. What made it more remarkable was that, with the going down of the sun, the "Big Horn" road was practically in running order again, while the "Seattle," its powerful rival of the past, was still blockaded. Traversing as they did for twenty miles the same territory, the lines divided only by the narrow gorge of the Red Water, it was strange to mark the bustle and life along the north bank,—the lights, head and tail, of passenger-, freight-, and cattle-trains hurrying away eastward,—and by contrast to note the silence on the hither shore. All day long the "booming" Western city, the railway centre of the populous section, had been thronged with people over and above its post-office list; first, the farmers and villagers from all over the county, second, the tramps and toughs and vagrants from all over creation. These latter, having joined forces with the strikers early in the game, had speedily, as has been seen, taken the bit in their teeth, the game into their own hands, and the destruction of trains by fire and

flame, and the wholesale robbery of freight-cars was their doing, not that of the disaffected railwaymen who, all too late, wished themselves rid of their desperado allies. But, all over the neighborhood now, among the saloons that bordered the yards, the cheap taverns and lodging-houses,—all through the crowds of sullen, disheartened men skulking about the street corners, undecided whether to give up and go back to duty or launch out on some new enterprise at the expense of the road, the story had gone far and wide how that fellow in the Derby hat and plain clothes had taken command of a company of “melishy,”—“tin soldiers, by Gawd! nothing better,” and had so coolly handled them, and in so cold-blooded a way had “loaded up” with solid lead and given the gang to understand that he’d let daylight through their hides if they stirred a foot through the company’s gates, that the mob that went there bent on destruction, determined to burn and loot the offices and warehouses, slunk away completely cowed. “That feller’s boss of the Big Horn yards this day, boys, and we ain’t in it,” was the way the leader of the strikers expressed it, and there was no sane man who cared to put it to the test.

Ascribe it to whatever cause we may, it was a petrified fact that from the instant Eric Lang-

don stepped out at the head of that company the Big Horn's property was safe. The few willing workers left to the management took hold with a vim. An experimental train, guarded by militiamen from other companies, was started down the Red Water. A construction-train followed with soldier boys manning both brakes and shovels. Channing, the hustling manager, tumbled clerks, bookkeepers, switchmen, and car-smiths into engine-cabs, wired for others to meet them at Gunnison, and actually had his trains moving at the very moment when the "Seattle" sheds were going up in flame, and the great general manager of that great corporation, with curses in his heart and his hands in his pockets, stood scowling on the scene of ruin through which the belated regulars were driving the last vestiges of the mob, and Mr. Barclay, the general manager aforementioned, was both thinking and saying unwholesome things of the regulars' commander, at whose hospitable board he had been wining and dining but a month or so ago—the too deliberate Captain Nathan.

What Melville would have said to that crest-fallen officer, when at last about noon his train and command arrived, cannot well be conjectured, but that the long delay was of serious import there can be no doubt, for Captain Nathan's

explanation in writing was demanded and forwarded a day or two later, and both the unique explanation and old "Gray Fox's" * telling reply were speedily the talk of the Department of the Platte. Nathan said that it was true he might have earlier reached the Red Water Valley, but he conceived that his first duty was to protect the lives of his devoted men and prevent the possibility of an ambuscade or pitfall. To this end every dangerous bridge was examined, certain deep cuts were explored, etc., before he deemed it safe to proceed. He admitted long delay at the Junction, but declared it necessary because of the alarming reports brought him by "reliable railway officials," to the effect that the tracks were undermined, the trestles "sawed," and every mile of the "Seattle" from the Junction to Brentwood a thread of mines and man-traps. It was true, he said, that the train bearing some militia companies had passed him at Gunnison and gone forward by the "Big Horn" road, but the way was cleared for them by the sheriff and other officials, whereas on the south bank no friends were to be hoped for.

And so it had resulted, to the unspeakable

* The name of "Gray Fox" was given by the Indians to the famous frontier soldier at that time commanding the Department of the Platte.

disgust of the few officers with Nathan's command, that the untried militia, under fearless and energetic leadership, had forced their way, despite mobs and obstructions, to the seat of action and rescued the property of the "Big Horn" road, while the regulars, hampered by their timorous head, were held back for hours in front of purely imaginary obstacles, and only reached the yards at Brentwood in time to find the buildings a mass of flame. Even that calamity might not have happened but that at eleven in the forenoon Major Melville, learning that the mob was drifting away from the "Big Horn" and gathering in threatening force about the "Seattle" yards down on the south side, had hurried in from the suburbs, whither he had gone to station the recently rusticated battalion, and while standing on the platform of the freight-house, calm and unmoved in the presence of a jeering, howling pack of tatterdemajons, and writing an order summoning certain companies to the spot, was suddenly struck in the head by a coupling-pin hurled by vigorous and vengeful hand, and felled to the ground, stunned and senseless.

That was a sore blow to the "Seattle." It left the situation on the south side in the hands of the rioters for over an hour. Word was

sent to little Major McConville, but he with his men was moving and guarding cattle-trains. The best he could do was to send a company on the run, but their captain had had no experience. The sheriff vainly tried to tell them how Langdon had handled things over at the "Big Horn." *He* would take no responsibility. *They* dare not, and the mob saw it in a twinkling. The only wonder is they did not dash upon this isolated command and by sheer force of numbers bear it down and seize its arms. When at last the Nathan train steamed in and the command tumbled off at the suburbs, it was the younger officers who led the detachment,—Nathan retaining forty of his men ostensibly to guard the train, but it was his own precious hide of which he was thinking. He decided to establish his head-quarters in his own car, while Torrance with thirty sturdy batterymen on one flank, and Woodrow with a like number on the other, shoved ahead and, guided by deputy sheriffs and railway officials, did their belated work in short order, and yet in deep chagrin. Santley, sullen and disgusted, was retained with Nathan as adjutant, and he could only obey.. The news of Melville's prostration reached them five miles out from town and completed Nathan's demoralization, even while it threw him in supreme

command. The first thing he did, therefore, was to send back a messenger to Gunnison, trundled all the way on a hand-car, to wire from there to Omaha and Pawnee the grievous tidings that Major Melville had been stricken down by rioters and lay insensible in charge of the physicians. Nathan thought the situation demanded reënforcement at once. So did old "Gray Fox," commanding at Omaha, and the latter ordered thither just one man, a captain of infantry senior in rank to Nathan. What they needed was a cool head, said he, not cold feet, and lest the uninitiated should misinterpret the phrase let it be explained here and now that "cold feet" is soldier synonyme for "scare."

Things were indeed in grievous shape when the vice-presidential car rolled into the "Seattle" yards and ranged up alongside that of Captain Nathan. By that time, thanks to Santley, sentinels had been thrown about the sacred precincts, and, seeing no rioters in the immediate neighborhood, "Sheeny" had measurably recovered his nerve. He hoped to make favorable impression on his wife's plutocratic uncle, but Mr. Barclay sniffed the fumes of smouldering thousands, and the sight of half a mile of smoking ruins up the track soured him utterly. All this could have been prevented had Nathan

shown any dash, pluck, energy,—any of the qualities railwaymen admire and so many possess. And then to think that even now the “Big Horn” was open! He had seen Channing’s first train whistling down the opposite side of the gorge. He learned from his satellites, boarding the car to the east of town, of the almost miraculous rescue of the Big Horn’s buildings. A tremendous story it made by that time, and the heart of the magnate was sore in his bosom that such ill should have befallen the “Seattle,” such good fortune the “Missouri Valley.” He hated Channing anyhow. Channing was sprung from the ranks, had worked his way up, step by step, from section boss to superintendent in one road after another. He had been assistant general superintendent of the “Seattle” only a few years back, and when the vacancy occurred that should have been tendered to so energetic and valuable a man it was Barclay who opposed it. “Channing’s all right for an assistant or subordinate,” said he, “but he hasn’t the education or the social position a superintendent should have.” So a man with Barclay’s requirements got the promotion over Channing’s head, whereat the latter instantly resigned, went over to the Northern Pacific for a short term, and then it was the “Big Horn” that tendered

him the superintendency, and within another year made him general manager. "If the president and board of directors will look after the finances," said he, "I'll run the road." And run it he had, and marvellously well, to the secret dismay of the "Seattle." And now at the first serious clash he had straightened things out for his own road, while the strikers were smashing things for the "Seattle," and Barclay could have damned the day he let him go.

But that wasn't all.

It took hours to gather his forces and count the costs. Then he could have sworn that Melville had so ordered the distribution of troops as purposely to expose the Seattle's yards, whereas Melville had sent more troops to the south side than he had retained on the north,—little McConville with four companies having been detailed to cover the Seattle's lines, and Mac had saved their stock-trains, though he couldn't be everywhere at once and so protect their sheds and shops. Barclay had only succeeded in getting his division superintendents with improvised crews at work and his cattle off their cars and into the corrals when nightfall came; had found only a meagre half-dozen laborers for necessary work, Channing having earlier gathered in every willing hand the town afforded, and, when the

morning of the morrow dawned, the "Big Horn" shop whistle sounded as of yore, and its eastbound train set forth on time, while there was still only silence and smouldering ruin throughout the yards of the "Seattle."

Late that afternoon, weary, hollow-eyed, unshaved, but feeling hopeful and well-nigh content with his work, Eric Langdon was making the rounds of the "Big Horn" yards and visiting the sentries whom he had posted. With the full consent and coöperation of the little major and at the earnest request of Channing, he had assumed the duties of "military adviser," had personally coached three or four companies besides his now devoted followers of Company "G," and was recognized as a sort of field officer of the day, respected and looked up to by the entire command. McConville, differing with Nathan as to the management of affairs, had withdrawn from the south side during the early hours of the night and was quartered in an old passenger-car at the "Big Horn" yards. Captain Damrell, the "doughboy" right bower of old "Gray Fox," had reached town at midnight and supervised, if he did not actually supersede, Nathan. Channing, wearied but triumphant, was still at his post at the passenger station and in full telegraphic communication with his en-

tire line and with the president and board of directors. He was hungry and eager for dinner, but a "special" was coming full tilt from Gunnison Junction, and he could not go. The "Missouri Pacific" had rushed Mrs. Melville over its line post-haste to Omaha as the result of alarming despatches concerning the major's condition, and, with one of "Gray Fox's" staff officers as escort, she had spent the morning speeding up the line of the "Missouri Valley" and was expected every minute. Langdon had been duly informed of the injury inflicted on his honored chief and friend, but it was a time when his presence and services were sorely needed at the yards, and he had to be content with the tidings that Melville had been borne to the Brentwood House, given the best room and attention and was resting easily. Now, he was planning for a nap of perhaps an hour, for the mob was scattered in silent, sullen groups all over town, and so planning he came back towards the station and was surprised to see two carriages in waiting, and Channing with numbers of his subordinates on the platform. He was still more surprised when, with a volume of steam rushing from the 'scape valve, a powerful locomotive came ringing in from the east, two or three cars in its noisy wake, and be-

lated soldiers, newspaper correspondents, and railwaymen sprang to the platform, while Channing stepped forward to greet another party, followed by a little swarm of curious spectators. A moment later, as Langdon reached the steps, he saw Channing with a lady on his arm, elbowing a way through the circle. He saw the top of a little hat, a lady's hat, following in their lead, and his heart gave a sudden leap. The next instant he, too, broke through the fringe of townsfolk and, lifting his hat with his left hand, quietly possessed himself of a stylish travelling-bag with the other.

"Why—Mr. Langdon!" was the astonished cry of the damsel thus greeted, and though further words she spoke not for the moment, the light that flashed in Ethel Grahame's eyes, the color that sprang up in her cheeks, told the intruder that it was a more than welcome meeting.

"Oh, you'd known 'em both before!" said Channing, as the carriage whirled away. "Why, certainly! Hullo, if here isn't Barclay! Now, what the devil do you s'pose he wants? I want you to come to the Brentwood and dine with me, Mr. Langdon—soon as I get rid of these people."

Another carriage drove straight to the plat-

form and unloaded. First Barclay, scrupulously groomed and dressed as usual, but pale and haggard; then two of his superintendents, both well known to Channing in earlier days. Forward they came until within close hailing distance, and then, with a jaunty, half-patronizing, half-envious tone, the magnate of the "Seattle" accosted his rival from the ranks, and the throng closed in about them.

"Well, Channing, luck's been with you again, hasn't it? What'll you take for your rabbit's paw?"

"Luck!" laughed Channing, triumph in his twinkling eyes. "'Twasn't luck, but pluck, and here's our rabbit's paw. Mr. Barclay, shake hands with Captain Langdon."

"*This?*—Why——" was all Barclay could find to say, as he turned and saw and turned a saffron red.

"Yes," said Langdon, placidly, as he shifted both his hands behind him. "I have met the—manager before."

CHAPTER IX

EVENTFUL days in the life of Eric Langdon were those following the collapse of the great railway strike at Brentwood. It was but natural that the officials of the "Big Horn" should vaunt themselves over a victory that not only broke up a mob, but quite as effectually downed the "Seattle." The chagrin of Messrs. Barclay and others representing that powerful and wealthy corporation could not be concealed despite all their brave show of satisfaction. The "Big Horn" had all trains running and its livestock in Chicago before the "Seattle" could succeed in firing a freight-engine. The "Big Horn" behaved magnanimously to its misguided employés, for Channing was a man ever in touch with the great army of operatives and knew how best to win their sympathies and willing service. Every engineer, fireman, and train hand who had not taken active part in the destruction of property was back at his post inside of twenty-four hours, whereas the anger, envy, and disgust rankling in Mr. Barclay's bosom against the "Big Horn" could only find vent in malicious newspaper items at the expense of the rival

management and heroic measures at that of his men. It was a day of disaster to the "Seattle" and of triumph for the "Big Horn," and the breach, already broader than the gorge of the Red Water, now widened between the roads. Channing couldn't help bragging and exulting, and it was bad policy. The "Seattle" was much the richer company of the two. Its stock was mainly held in England and the Eastern States, whereas the "Big Horn" was Western in ownership and management. Barclay gave a big dinner at the Brentwood House three days after the break of the strike, to which all local journalists and magnates were bidden, the cigars and champagne for which were expressed from Chicago, and in the post-prandial eloquence on that flowery occasion much stress was laid on the fact that the "Seattle" would rather suffer double its loss than that it should go down to history as having won its victory by means of shotted guns, in the hands of hireling soldiery, levelled at the breast of Brentwood's manhood. Captain Nathan made an effective speech in response to the toast to the Army. "It would have been an easy matter," said he, "for my brave men to shoot their speedier way to the scene of action, but that from his great and merciful heart the general manager of the 'Seattle'

declared that he would rather the earnings of a thousand years went up in smoke than that the blood of one honest toiler should flow at their doors." Tremendous and long-continued applause ensued, through which Santley and Woodrow sat in grim silence, and in which even Torrance only half-heartedly joined, for well they remembered Barclay's almost frenzied appeals to Nathan to get ahead for God's sake and do something, if he had to dam the Red Water with the dead. Melville, his eyes covered, his head still bandaged, lay upon a low couch in an upper room, attended by his devoted wife and niece. The sound of revelry by night came from below with explosive puffs, and the manager of the Brentwood twice tapped at the door to express his regret and anxiety and the hope that the major wasn't being disturbed. "It's the 'Seattle's' blow-out," he explained, "and the road's setting 'em up for all-comers, apparently."

"When does the 'Big Horn' set 'em up?" asked Melville, with a smile of amusement.

"The B. H. don't have to," answered Boniface. "By the way, sir, Mr. Channing goes East again to-morrow, and he hopes that you will feel able to see him. Of course *he* isn't at the banquet," he added, with a grin. "We've

had a queer time with the rival factions in the house."

It had indeed been a queer time. Barclay, as became the managing head of a great road, had taken a suite of rooms on the parlor floor with his secretary, typewriters, and assistants, while Channing and his one aide-de-camp, Mr. Langdon, occupied modest rooms on the floor above and attended to business over at the station. Barclay nodded patronizingly when he met or passed Channing, and once so far unbent as to take one hand out of his trousers pocket and extend a finger to his rival. But he never seemed to see Langdon, and Langdon had an aggravating way of looking straight into the other's face in a calmly speculative manner, as though he considered him some curious specimen of the "freak" family, a subject for leisurely contemplation, but in no wise a thing to be accosted.

The regular officers and many of those of the State troops took their rations at the Brentwood the few days they were there on duty, and it was curious to note the effect on the two occasions that Langdon entered the dining-room while the military was there. The Guardsmen to a man either arose to shake his hand or else whirled around in their seats and waved him joyous greeting. Woodrow, of the artillery, too, sprang

to his feet and ostentatiously went half across the dining-room to clap him on the shoulders or slap him between them on the broad of the back. Once, finding a vacant seat by Langdon's side, the rash subaltern quit the table of his commanding officer and finished his dinner at Channing's, and Nathan and Torrance, who never saw Langdon at all, took prompt note of the desertion and held it up against the youngster as an affront to be expiated through many a slight and snub and semiofficial annoyance when they harked back to Pawnee. It was plain that Langdon was a marked man in the eyes of the populace; envied, respected, and esteemed by one element and feared and hated by another.

"It's just as well you are going with Mr. Channing," said mine host of the Brentwood to him the night of the banquet. "There's a bad undercurrent here that will never forgive your spoiling their plans, and those fellows of the 'Seattle,' who would have thanked God for your services at the time, are now doing the best they know how to stir up sentiment against you."

"But I'm not going with Mr. Channing," said Langdon, promptly. "They've offered me a good position here."

The landlord was leaning against a column

of the rotunda at the moment, smoking one of Barclay's best. A roar of applause and alternating currents of "He's a Jolly Good Fellow" and "Auld Lang Syne" issued from the swinging portals of the hall, and Boniface had been listening with a comical grin on his face. But at Langdon's words the expression of amusement gave way to one of deep concern. Impressively he stood erect and placed a hand on Langdon's shoulder. "My dear sir," said he, "I mustn't be quoted in this matter. I like you and I want to see you come out all right, but—don't think of staying here. I'll say as much to Mr. Channing."

And he did. But Channing was flushed with victory. "Who's to harm him? And what's to prevent?" said he. "Our men are all with us now, and they swear by him and will stand by him and will see to it that he isn't molested," was Channing's answer. "He's just the fearless, reliable man we need for a certain kind of work, and here's the place for him."

But the landlord shook his head. "Mr. Channing," said he, earnestly, "I see and hear things you cannot see and hear because men look and talk sweet when you come around. It's their bread and butter. You manage your business in the interest of your stockholders and I must

do the same for mine. I must attract custom, not antagonize it and lose my job. I mustn't offend those fellows of the other road, for some of them are stockholders of this very shop, and they're not fond of you, much less of Mr. Langdon. If you want to reward and help him, take him to Chicago. Don't attempt to settle him here."

But the mere idea that one of his chosen should be menaced by the enemy was enough to set Channing solidly against a change of plan. He went to Melville's room in the morning to say good-by, and found that Boniface had been there before him, for Melville, too, was anxious. Mrs. Melville had gone out to do some shopping, Miss Grahame sat in silence, an absorbed listener. That evening Langdon knocked, as usual, at Melville's door to inquire what manner of day his friend had had and whether he could be of service. Miss Grahame was just coming forth, dressed for the street.

"The troops go back to Pawnee to-night," she said, "and some of the officers are coming up in a moment to bid good-by. I thought I should like a brisk walk."

He hesitated a moment. He well knew to whom she referred by "some of the officers," and why she referred to them at all. It would

be embarrassing all around for him to meet them there. It was significant of her own desire to avoid Nathan and his set that she should be going out just as they were expected. Langdon's first impulse was to offer to escort her, for night was falling and the electric globes were already sparkling on the snowy streets, and with all her independence and fearlessness Miss Grahame might be wiser not to go forth unattended. But he faltered. The weather had set in sharper, colder, and he had no civilian overcoat and would not wear the "frogged" and braided garment of his late rank and profession now that he no longer held the commission. He could have spared himself any scruples as to that, since dozens of civilians East and West wear that army overcoat because it strikes them as handsome, because it gives them an air of distinction, and because there is no law to hinder. It was not on account of lack of warm clothing he hesitated, but—one glance at his worn old business suit, made three years before and much too snug for him now, banished all thought of tendering his services.

"I may go in, may I not?" he said, after a moment.

"Oh, yes," was the answer, as she threw open the door to admit him, and then as he entered

stood there, thinking. Twice her fine, thoughtful eyes followed him into the room. Twice she caught herself listening for the sound of their voices and trying to catch the words; then, with heightened color, turned sharply and stood within the room. A little party of artillery officers were issuing from the elevator. Another moment and they were knocking at the door.

"Good-evening, Captain Nathan. Good-evening, gentlemen," was her placid salutation. "Yes, the major will be glad to see you," and, one after another, she ushered the quartette into the dimly-lighted apartment where Mr. Melville came forward to greet them. "You'll come up again to-morrow, Langdon," she heard Melville say as Santley bent over her to express his disappointment that she should be going out just as they were coming in. Couldn't she wait a moment, he would so like—— No, evidently she couldn't. Moreover, she made it impossible for Santley to complete his sentence by calmly saying, "Now, Mr. Langdon, if you are quite ready," and thereby giving Santley to understand her escort was already chosen. Santley glanced at Langdon, turned red, and looked as though he really wanted to speak. Langdon, passing Nathan without a sign, looked straight

into the eyes of his adjutant and plainly indicated that he had no desire whatever to converse with him. Two minutes later, in the keen, frosty air of the wide Western street, he found himself swiftly pacing the broad wooden sidewalk, crackling with cold under their light footfalls, Ethel Grahame, with bright eyes and flushed cheeks and quick, elastic steps, springing along by his side, her hand within his arm. Had any one told him the day he so sadly left Pawnee that this would be a possibility in the near future Eric Langdon could hardly have believed.

The air was crisp, keen, and sharply cold, but there was no wind, and he never seemed to feel the lack of an overcoat. His old cutaway was a handsome, stylish garment when first it came to him three years ago, but buttons and button-holes were straining now, as he filled his lungs with the ozone and oxygen of that rare, exhilarating atmosphere. The shops at the street corners at first were brilliantly lighted, and the bridge over the Red Water was lively with sleighs, street-cars, and pedestrians hurrying homeward. It was she who had turned southward as they left the hotel at the ladies' door, and it made no difference to him. His habitat was the north side,—the yards of the "Big Horn,"—but she had chosen the opposite direc-

tion, away from what might be called the residence side of the city.

"It is a fad of mine," she said. "I like to see as much as I can of every place I visit, and I've never been on the other side."

"Nor I," he answered. "Being a 'Big Horner' now my work keeps me at our yards all day."

"Do you like it?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"It is interesting—and exacting," he replied, guiding her carefully over a broken crosswalk. The streets seemed neglected hereabouts. There was a saloon on every corner and a knot of loafers at almost every saloon. "I'm almost sorry you chose this route, Miss Grahame," he continued, noting the curious looks that were bent upon him and his companion,—noting, too, an occasional elbow nudge among the loiterers.

"The 'Seattle' side doesn't seem to be the better side, does it?" she answered, half laughing. "But then I've twice been to your station and the scene of your exploit. I thought I should like to see what was left of the 'Seattle.' Oh, Mr. Langdon, I'm afraid there's trouble!"

Not forty feet away the double doors of a saloon suddenly swung violently outward, and a little group of men came surging and strug-

gling forth. One, a young soldier in artillery uniform, hampered by his heavy overcoat, and bending double and striving to protect his head, was in the grasp of two powerful toughs who, followed by a third, were furiously kicking and striking at their almost helpless victim. Half a block farther down the street, hurrying towards the station, all ignorant of the plight of their comrade, two soldiers were striding swiftly away. In an instant Langdon's voice rang down the wide thoroughfare in the old-time, powerful, commanding tones she had heard on the parade at Pawnee. "This way, 'D' Battery, lively! This way!" Then followed, "Stand here just one minute, Miss Grahame." And with that he sprang from her side. She saw him launch into the fray with the leap of a panther, lithe, supple, quick as a cat. She saw the lightning blows that sent two of the brutal assailants crashing their full length on the sidewalk, saw him whirl upon the third, who darted back into the saloon, and the next instant there was an impressive tableau under the sputtering electric light. Langdon, bareheaded, spare and athletic, with clinching fists gazing down at two bewildered ruffians slowly struggling to their feet. A young batteryman, blood-covered and feeble, clinging to the lamp-post; a barkeeper in shirt-sleeves, with

two or three satellites peering out from the doorway, and two stalwart soldiers, just arrived, facing their former officer, and, with the instinct of long habit, standing at the salute.

Five minutes later the rescued batteryman was being led away by his comrades, and a street-car was conveying the rescuer and his fair, pale-faced, silent companion back to the hotel.

"Keep your eye open for those fellows after this night's work," whispered the policeman who had escorted them to the crossing; but Langdon paid little heed, for presently Ethel spoke.

"You must let me mend that coat at once, Mr. Langdon," said she; and, glancing down, he saw that the swelling muscles had burst both button-holes at the chest, and the old cutaway was a wreck indeed.

CHAPTER X

THREE days more and Melville was pronounced well enough to travel and Langdon was alone. The first flush of enthusiasm over his exploits had died out. The populace of Brentwood had settled down to its usual routine and, but for some scores of unemployed men and a gang of troublesome tramps infesting the outskirts, little was left in the town itself to recall the excitement and turmoil of the days of the strike. Over in the yard of the "Seattle" masons and carpenters by the dozen were busily at work, nearly all of them local craftsmen. The ill wind that whirled the "Seattle's" thousands up in smoke and flame was blowing modest hundreds into the pockets of Brentwood's artisans and, through them, to the coffers of Brentwood's merchants. The "Big Horn" might be the better managed road in some respects, said Brentwood, but the "Seattle" brings the money. Barclay's banquet had turned many a head and not a few hearts among the municipal leaders, and Barclay's dollars were potent among the people. The regulars had gone home over the "Seattle," the Guardsmen had preceded them over the "Big

Horn," and the roads had returned to the guardianship of their own watchmen and Brentwood's police. The sheriff had discharged his extra deputies, and Eric Langdon, beginning the world over again on a modest salary, took counsel with himself in the absence of other advisers, and planned his daily life. It had been Channing's expectation that he should take a room near the yards and his meals at the Brentwood, but Langdon had decided on rigid economy. It might be long months before he could hope for promotion and better pay, and it was his determination to save at least half of each month's stipend to go towards the payment of his debts and ten dollars more to form a fund on which he could depend in the event of ills or accident. Mine host of the Brentwood hated, he said, to have him go, but directed him to a quiet, homelike little place, where he secured a room and plain but sufficient board under the roof of a widow whose sole support had been killed in a collision on the "Seattle" three years before. Yet the hotel man was at heart not sorry to see him go. He liked him well, but certain of the owners did not. He begged Langdon to come round and make himself at home whenever he felt like it, but secretly hoped he might be too busy. There had been a few days imme-

diately following the strike when the mayor, certain of the common council, the district attorney, and other prominent citizens and business men had expressed themselves as delighted to meet Mr. Langdon and as grateful beyond words for his gallant conduct at a critical time. But since Barclay's banquet they met him with a certain constraint when they met him at all, for his duties kept him at the yards from early morn till after dark. There seemed to be just one set of men whose eyes lighted up at sight of him, who were eager to press his acquaintance, and many of whom never passed him without some semblance of a military salute. These were the members of the Brentwood Rifles, officially known as Company "C" of the Fourth Nebraska. One evening, hardly a week after Melville had gone, three of them came to see him. "Cap," they said, "was going to quit." He had been so quizzed and criticised for letting the strikers get away with their guns that he couldn't stand the pressure. The lieutenants were green, and—wouldn't Mr. Langdon come round to the armory two evenings a week and drill them? Now, Langdon had been planning a course of reading in the library of the Young Men's Christian Association, but the Rifles were importunate. Something might come of it, and

he consented. Eighteen men appeared the first night—Tuesday—and thirty-eight the second,—Friday. One of the lieutenants was the son of the leading banker of Brentwood, the other a young lawyer. Both greeted him civilly and sat and watched his work with absorbing interest. The third night “Cap” came round and looked on. Forty-four men were in ranks, twice as many as he could ever scrape together for drill, and though he shook hands with Langdon during a rest and said he found his business required all his time and attention, and therefore he had concluded to resign, his manner lacked cordiality. Two weeks later a committee waited on Langdon to know if he would accept the command of the company if elected, and, after an exchange of letters between himself and Channing, Langdon said that if unanimously chosen and the lieutenants waived promotion he would serve. Then it got into the papers. The members of the company, as a rule, were young clerks, bookkeepers, and salesmen, highly intelligent and full of enthusiasm, but their hapless experience had made them the laughing-stock of the street boys, the railway shopmen, and the vagabond class of the community as well as of certain envious fellow-citizens. “Tin soldiers” they were called, when all that was needed to

make them a force to be dreaded by law-breakers was a captain who knew his business, could command their respect and teach them steadiness, drill, and discipline. Lieutenant Perrigo was presiding at the meeting when a sergeant arose and in a caustic speech pointed out their needs and defects, and, saying there was just one man in the community capable of doing them justice, proposed that the captaincy be tendered to Mr. Eric Langdon, whereat the whole meeting, barring its presiding officer, sprang to its feet and cheered. There was not a dissenting voice and forty-nine members were present.

Yet within a week the *Brentwood Banner* began publishing insidious little paragraphs. "It is understood that the Rifles contemplate a change in the captaincy. What has Brentwood done that several capable officers should be overlooked and the command tendered to a kicked-out captain from the army?" was the first specimen. The *Examiner* asked if the Rifles expected to add to their popularity by putting at their head a man who would have slaughtered a score of fellow-citizens but for the prompt and merciful intervention of local officials. The *Examiner* was supporting the sheriff for reëlection, and this official well knew the paragraph to be utterly unjust and untrue, but—he couldn't

quarrel with his bread and butter, and it was best to tacitly admit, now that the danger was over, that he had actually interposed in behalf of the strikers. At all events, he did nothing to cause its correction. The *Brentwood Sun*, Populist, said if anything was needed to add to the contempt in which the Rifles were held it was the rumor that they had tendered the command to an ex-officer of the army whose drunken folly was so near to costing scores of precious lives not a fortnight since. And Langdon, who stood ready to devote valuable time and energy to the public service with little hope of any reward whatever, read these insidious attacks with infinite pain and sense of wrong and injustice against which he stood powerless. Other influences, too, were evidently at work. The election, which was to have taken place the first Monday in January, was postponed a fortnight. Boniface, Eric's friend of the Brentwood, took him aside and advised him to withdraw his name. The committee, on the contrary, had begged him to "stand pat." Meantime, Langdon continued drilling and instructing the company, and two nights a week the armory was crowded with citizens whose interest had been aroused and who came to look on. Veteran soldiers, G. A. R. men, went away saying that

fellow knew his trade up to the handle. Prominent business men looked on silently and did a good deal of thinking as they strolled homeward. Newspaper reporters, previously instructed, wrote scathing or satirical paragraphs about martinet mannerisms, imported instructors, dismissed drillmasters, and the like, and Eric, proud, sad, sensitive, would gladly have given up and shut himself in his sooty den at the yards but for a letter from Melville, to whom he had sent all the papers. "Stick to it, Langdon," he said. "The time will come when the very papers that abuse you now will have to change their tune." This was what the major's letter said, but not the major's hand. His eyes still felt the force of that cruel blow, and Ethel Grahame was his amanuensis. "I have faith in your future," said he. "So have I," in tiny letters wrote the amanuensis, "E. G." And so, despite the warning of mine host of the Brentwood, Langdon stood for election the third Monday in January—and was beaten fifty to ten,—the second lieutenant and son of Brentwood's richest banker being the successful competitor. "A Merited Rebuke," referring to Langdon, said the *Sun*. "A Merited Promotion," referring to Perrigo junior, a boy of twenty-two, said the *Banner*. "A Foregone

Conclusion," said the *Examiner*. But it was noticeable that the two last named refrained from further active abuse of Langdon. The object of the magnates was accomplished in compassing the defeat of what the *Sun* called his "aspirations." Down in their hearts both editors and magnates realized that Langdon was a wronged and injured man. It wouldn't do to say so, of course, yet he had checked that mob at a moment when its triumph meant the birth of a reign of terror in Brentwood. He alone had stood between them and anarchy. They bowed to the behest of the "Seattle" because it practically owned them. The editor of the *Banner* met Langdon at the Brentwood two days later, stopped, stammered, and held out his hand. "Mr. Langdon, my name's Armstrong," said he. "I'm managing editor of the *Banner*, and I thought I'd like to say to you that I—I personally don't approve of the attitude my paper has had to assume in your case. I suppose you know that papers have to carry out certain lines of policy, and sometimes attack men whom the editors would much rather befriend."

Langdon turned very white. His hand naturally had been extended to accept that of the stranger,—it is the American fashion,—but now it was withdrawn. His lips quivered a bit, but

his eyes never flinched from their gaze straight into those of the journalist's.

"I have no use whatever for the friendship of a man who will privately assure me of his good will," said he, "and publicly defame me." Then he turned his back on him and walked away.

Boniface saw the whole thing and gasped. Sherwood, clerk at the desk, and Bingham, Brentwood's mayor, were also witnesses, and the story spread. Here was a man who not only wasn't scared of a mob, but even dared the Press, and the man who can do that in this land of freedom takes his life in his hands.

"You've cooked your goose," said Boniface, sadly, for he had grown to like Langdon more than a little and to feel for him deeply in his loneliness. "You've made an enemy of the most powerful newspaper man west of Omaha."

But he hadn't. Armstrong was poor; he was the servant of the stockholders and they of the "Seattle;" he couldn't afford to throw up his job and see his wife and children suffer, but he had a conscience. He knew that Langdon was right and the *Banner* wrong. He was cut to the quick by Langdon's contempt, but the man in him overcame the sense of indignity, and, putting himself in Langdon's place and asking him-

self what he would have felt and said, he went back to his office raging, not at Langdon, but at Fate. He had seen much of Melville during that officer's brief stay. He knew his reputation,—the story of his spotless life and soldierly career. He knew of Melville's sympathy for Langdon, and had heard Melville's high encomium of Langdon as an officer and a gentleman. He was filled with admiration of Langdon's conduct at the time of the riots, and had then referred to him in terms of unstinted praise. But, that danger ended, the *Banner* had to return to the paths of policy dictated by its owners, and Armstrong had been a journalist years of his life and had fallen into the journalistic way of looking at things. He had become accustomed to seeing reputable citizens, at the beck of the management, made the object of editorial scorn, invective, and derision where the citizen referred to did not happen to be in accord with the views of the paper. He toyed with human reputation as a cat with a helpless mouse. He could blast a fellow-being's good name in a stinging article and send reporters to him for information, an interview, or a favor any day of the week. He abused the "Big Horn" at the beck of the "Seattle" one minute and wrote to Channing for passes for his family in the

next. He could represent the Honorable Mr. Cadger as anything from an anarchist to an ass of the first magnitude in the effort to defeat him for Congress, and expect the ass to bid him to dinner and show him the sights when they met in Washington later. He could denounce the army as oppressors of the people, and its officers as insolent, overbearing, empty-headed, liveried satraps day after day, and yet write letter after letter begging for a commission for his son. He could "rip a man up the back" in the morning's issue for opposing prohibition and invite him to drink before night. He would knock a man endwise—or try to—who personally called him a fool, a knave, a liar, or no gentleman, yet he professed to believe that when his paper so described some other man and sent its denunciation broadcast throughout the community, and, as often happened, did so without right or reason, the deeply injured person should never resent it, but rest content that the editor had merely opposed him politically or had "acted from conscientious motives." He actually thought that his assurance of personal liking for Langdon ought to compensate for the harsh things said of him in the *Banner*, and was stung when it didn't. But at heart he could not but admire Langdon for his square, straightforward

response. It was a revelation, an eye-opener. It set him to thinking of the other side, not the paper side, of the question, and then he wished that he had that month to live over again. There should be no more abuse of Langdon in the *Banner* if he could help it, but of course there couldn't be retraction or amend. No matter what the injury, no self-respecting journal can ever be expected to come to that. It "weakens the influence of the paper" ever to admit itself in the wrong.

And so there was a certain reaction in favor of Langdon. Some of the Rifles resigned their warrants, secured their discharges, and then set to work to raise another company for Langdon to drill. The men were easily found. Seventy stalwart young fellows signed the petition and brought it to Langdon to add his name. Then it went to the governor. There were vacancies in the regiment. A company was mustered in at Neosha; another, made up mainly of farmer boys, at Gunnison Junction. But some strange, occult influence seemed against the would-be Brentwood Light Guard. The petition hung fire. State Senator Suplee and Representative Carter said that they would see to it that the Light Guard was duly admitted, but they didn't. Meantime the Rifles prospered, as a social or-

ganization at least; took in a number of honorary members at fifty dollars apiece, got a "swell" uniform, gave a series of most successful dancing-parties and what they termed exhibition drills, where the clock-work precision with which some thirty of their number executed the loadings and firings in unison evoked tumultuous applause. It prompted the Rifles to issue a challenge to all-comers west of the Mississippi and east of the mountains to compete for a valuable prize at the Exposition Building in April, the anniversary of their muster in, and the next thing the Rifles knew Eric Langdon was going down to Gunnison twice a week to coach the Gunnison Grays, Company "K," Fourth Nebraska, and Brentwood, which had refused to avail itself of his services, was properly scandalized that he should tender them elsewhere. The *Sun* couldn't say much now because it was down on the Rifles anyhow and catered to the farmers. The *Banner* wouldn't say much because Armstrong was ashamed of what he had said, and this happened to be a matter that didn't bother the "Seattle." But the *Examiner*, which had done what it could to make Langdon friendless in his new position at the yards, now duly and frequently expressed its abhorrence of the man who could turn traitor

to his own people and work against "the best interests of the community in whose midst he had found a home and the livelihood denied him elsewhere." Appeals were written to Channing to compel his subordinate to remain at his post. Channing answered that his post now included Gunnison. Efforts were made to stir up a cabal against him among the Grays, but he had had a two weeks' start, and had won their good will; besides, there was now that thousand-dollar prize hanging up for all-comers, and companies from Minnesota, Iowa, and Kansas had entered the list. So the Grays stood firm. Then the Brentwoods strove to hedge and to limit the contest to companies that "had not received professional assistance," but that reacted upon themselves. Then the *Sun* was inspired to see what it could do to stir up a strike against Langdon in the yards of the "Big Horn," where there must be men who rebelled against the supervision of a strict, soldier-bred overseer. There were, but they were in the minority, and the three who started and circulated a paper calling for Langdon's dismissal or a strike were suddenly, by Channing's order, hauled up before the superintendent and "given the sack." Then anonymous letters began to rain in on the superintendent at Brentwood and higher officials

in Chicago. Langdon was drinking again. Langdon was gambling. Langdon was speculating through a broker in Omaha, and these, investigated unbeknownst to Langdon, fell flat. He had won the respect of the better class of men. He had become an expert train hand. He minded his own business, yet was full of sympathy and interest in the affairs of the operatives and the crews of the trains. In March the superintendent of the "Seattle" offered him a similar berth at bigger pay provided he would move to Sioux City, and the offer was declined. In April the great drill came off. The flag of the Rifles was trailed in the dust. They were not even "placed" by the judges, and the great prize was won in almost a walkover by the Gunnison Grays.

Time and again Langdon had received warnings from the police that there was a gang on the south side ever watching for a chance to "do him up," and from mine host of the Brentwood that there were influential men on the north side, potent in the councils of the "Big Horn," who would hurt him if they could. One day there came a curt summons from a local lawyer to the effect that bills to the amount of three hundred and fifty dollars had been placed in his hands for collection, and calling upon him

to take immediate steps to meet them. Langdon called to inquire, and was curtly, almost insolently, received. He learned enough, however, to convince him that two of the bills were those of dealers at Pawnee to whom he had regularly and conscientiously been paying ten dollars a month apiece. The inference was plain. Nathan had bought in the balance of the claims and sent them through Perrigo's bank for collection. In his trouble Langdon wrote to Channing, but no answer came. Twice the latter had written him that the president and certain directors had spoken to him about Mr. Langdon's debts. It was evident that some enemy was hounding him, but so long as Channing was "on deck," as he wrote to Langdon, he could count on his support.

But Channing was no longer on deck. The incessant brain-work, the strain, the immense labor devolving on an active official of the road whose business outdid its resources, had finally told. Nervous prostration and collapse had ensued, and Channing was downed at last.

It was the first week in May and with all nature sweet and smiling about him, Eric Langdon came up from Gunnison on the early morning freight, his heart heavy as lead. He had spent the early hours of the previous night, Fri-

day, working hard with the Grays, for their ambition was boundless now and they had entered for a competition in an adjoining State. The night itself he had spent trying to sleep under the roof of his friend the station agent, but sleep would not come, and twice he arose and went out and walked the platform under the glistening stars. On Monday, said the lawyer, that money must be paid. Langdon had no appetite for breakfast. He took a cup of coffee at the station restaurant on reaching Brentwood, and though it was barely six o'clock, went to his office. Janitor and watchmen noted his haggard face and wondered at his early hours. Early as they were, some one had been there earlier. The safe door stood open,—the cash was gone.

CHAPTER XI

THERE are two kinds of men who deserve to be held in abhorrence,—those who are forever saying mean things about their fellows and those forever hearing them. The first are active mischief-makers, the second passive. The first are generally regarded as the more dangerous and objectionable, but as the result of some twenty years' study, I am constrained to believe the second the worst. The first has at least the courage of his convictions and says what he is mean enough to think. The second lacks even that degree of personal pluck, and, not daring to say the slander himself, gives it birth under the cloak of "I heard." How many of you who read have failed to meet the man who draws his chair close to yours and confidentially begins, "Say, what's this about Jimmy Rush? Now, I was told last night by a man in position to know," etc., etc., etc. Ask him who the man is and he shirks and becomes mysterious. "He's a—well, I promised not to mention his name,—but he's a gentleman. It was told me confidentially." The source is always intangible, but in nine cases out of ten you can safely bet your last dollar the informant never existed, and your

hopes of eternity that if he did he wasn't a gentleman. Gentlemen do not circulate slander.

But cads who have fallen below the plane of their fellow-men and cannot climb back seek to restore their social equilibrium by pulling others down. Captain Nathan got back to Pawnee to find himself in bad odor. Torrance, who would gladly have done a soldier's whole duty had he been permitted, was involved through his intimacy with Nathan in Nathan's growing unpopularity. Santley, who had had to serve as Nathan's adjutant, most unjustly now had to shoulder a section of Nathan's obloquy. Woodrow escaped because Nathan accused him of rank insubordination, and the youngster, with Rodney May and others to back him, as much as told Nathan he hoped he *would* prefer charges and have him tried by court-martial. A most unhappy state of affairs was sprung on the batteries at Pawnee, and the politely veiled compassion of the cavalry was something that made the gunners swear. Two or three troops under Channing and Stryker had done tip-top service during the riots. Infantry from Omaha and Leavenworth had saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in property and covered themselves with credit for cool, even-tempered, forbearing but resolute work. Everywhere had the regulars won un-

stinted praise from all law-abiding citizens except that one mishandled little battalion at Brentwood, and nothing prevented a court of inquiry but the feeling that, for the sake of the cloth, the whole thing were best ignored or forgotten. "An error of judgment" was laid at Nathan's door, but nothing more serious. And old "Cat," who secretly sympathized with Woodrow, was instructed to release the lad from arrest with the caution to hold his tongue and temper in the future. Then Melville was sent south at the urgent advice of the doctors, and by tacit consent Pawnee ceased discussion of Nathan's failure.

But great was the glorification among the Guardsmen of Nebraska, and widespread was the story of Mr. Langdon's prowess, and keen was the ridicule at the expense of the Brentwood Rifles and the rejoicing over the triumph of the Grays. Great was the applause that greeted Langdon's soldier pupils when they bore away the prize, and Langdon on their shoulders, and greater still the grief with which a few weeks later it was learned that the "Big Horn" had held that gentleman accountable for the robbery of its safe at Brentwood and discharged him from the service of the road.

And this takes us back to "hearers" at Paw-

nee. "I heard," said Captain Nathan, confidentially, to the new post-commander, six months after the riots and not six days after the receipt of the latest news from Nebraska,—“I heard from a source that can't be questioned that the real reason was that he had been peculating for months, and the robbery was to conceal his own stealings.” “I heard,” whispered Torrance, in the confidences begotten of Burgundy, to Major Snicker, of the staff, “that he had blown in over two thousand dollars in a bucket-shop in Chicago and detectives had been on to him for weeks.” All manner of things detrimental to Langdon had “Sheeny” and his few satellites heard in the same way, and all they did hear, and much more they did not, was duly communicated to such as would listen, who were fortunately few. It was Nathan's insidious stories that turned the local shopmen against the absent and the exile, and, incidentally, a pretty penny for their informant, as the tradesmen sold their claims to him for sixty cents on the dollar, and so confessed to Melville long weeks later. “I heard,” said Torrance, “that old Sharp ordered Langdon away from Sheridan and sent the sergeant of the guard to see him off the reservation.” “I heard,” said Nathan, “that Dr. Armistead gave him warning

that if he wasn't off the post before morning gunfire he'd give the whole story of his maltreatment of his wife to the papers, and that's what started him."

And now there was no Melville to stand his friend at Pawnee, for the major was summering at the sea-shore, slowly regaining health and strength, and lads like Rodney May and Woodrow had neither rank nor years sufficient to carry influence. And now, worse luck, there was none to befriend him at Chicago, for Channing, a sorely stricken man, had been taken to a sanatorium in the mountains. Summoned to the offices of the general manager and hauled up before a new king who knew not Joseph, Langdon could only sadly say he could throw no light on the robbery whatever. Two clerks, one of them the son of the division superintendent, knew the combination. One of them knew there was upward of six hundred dollars in the safe when Langdon went down to Gunnison as usual on Friday evening. "Had he gone on railway business?" was the question. "No, not this time,—solely to instruct the Gunnison company," was the frank reply. Mr. Channing's secretary told of Langdon's letter appealing for aid to meet the payment of three hundred and fifty dollars. The station-master at Gunnison

described Langdon's nervousness the night of the robbery,—told of his twice leaving his couch and going out and pacing the platform, and Langdon was informed by a curt note that he need not return to Brentwood,—his services would no longer be required.

And now there set in a revulsion of feeling at Brentwood as the summer wore on. The Rifles found that Perrigo's money and social position had failed to compensate for the loss of Langdon's skill, experience, and guiding hand. The company was falling to pieces. The Grays at Gunnison held a meeting and passed resolutions of sympathy and confidence, and, going down into their shallow pockets, sent Langdon a check for one hundred dollars and a letter that he read with swimming eyes. The *Brentwood Banner* that had abused and wronged him in the winter came out in a vigorous editorial, penned by Armstrong, wherein the base ingratitude of the "Big Horn" was heralded throughout Nebraska, and marked copies were sent to Langdon, who was seeking a clerkship in the quartermaster's department at Chicago, for the "Gray Fox" had been promoted to the double stars and the command of a division. But the one vacancy that occurred was demanded by half a dozen influential politicians for needy

henchmen, and the desk was given to a rank outsider. The selection was made in Washington, and the general could not help himself. There had been malicious rejoicing among the lower elements about the Brentwood yards that the division superintendent did not seem to deprecate. His son had stepped into Langdon's place, but wise heads and old hands among the men declared that he'd never fill his shoes. Then came a queer thing—a note from the general superintendent of the "Seattle" asking Langdon to call. He did, and was again tendered the office at Sioux City. "A proof," said the superintendent, "of Mr. Barclay's magnanimity." He tendered it in spite of the rumors affecting Mr. Langdon's integrity, not to mention Mr. Langdon's open discourtesy. In fact, Mr. Barclay wished to see Mr. Langdon and talk it over. Langdon went. He had sent most of his hundred dollars to pay off pressing debts and was in sore need. He waited full two hours before the magnate would see him, and then Barclay, tilting back in his chair and tendering neither hand nor seat, but in very distant and patronizing tone, informed Langdon that if he saw fit to make a written application for the position, and could furnish bonds, the 'Seattle' might be disposed to consider it." Two or three

directors were with the airy manager at the moment, and were curiously studying the pale-faced, thin-cheeked man who had balked the mob and saved the "Big Horn." They stared after him in amaze and then, in silence, at one another as Langdon made his brief reply, turned on his heel, and left the room.

"Pray do not strain yourself in the effort, Mr. Barclay. I will not make application and should not furnish bonds if I did."

That was one offer declined. Then came another. The managing editor of the *Palladium* sent for Langdon and asked him if he had ever done any newspaper work, and Langdon said that he had not, but he would be glad to try almost anything. The *Palladium* had begun a crusade against the officers of the army in general and at Sheridan in particular. Facts to substantiate its theories being necessary, the *Palladium* had drawn upon the *repertoire* of certain discharged and disgruntled soldiers ever to be found about the saloons, and upon the imagination of its reporters, to the end that many sensational stories were published which, while delighting the enemies of the army among the turbulent and unruly element in Chicago, succeeded only in disgusting the educated and the thinking men among its readers. The *Pal-*

ladium lost caste and subscribers in the clubs, the professions, and business circles generally. The management saw and pondered. It could not change its policy or drop the matter at its present stage without tacit admission of defeat. They perhaps could find a man who knew whereof he spoke, who could tell of many a discreditable thing at the expense of officers of the army,—things that, unlike almost everything it had asserted in the past, could not be disproved and denied. In the interests of the “Seattle” and the hope of winning friends and subscribers among the officers of both roads it had vigorously abused (“roasted” was the technical term) Mr. Langdon, and published several letters from its own correspondent at the scene of the riots (who happened to be the editor of the *Brentwood Sun*), in which poor Eric was held up to public obloquy as a drunken desperado, a reckless murderer, etc., etc. The *Sun* people found especial delight in the repetition of that assonant if not alliterative head-line, “A Kicked-Out Captain,” and the *Palladium* had taken it up, until one of its own reporters, a gentleman from top to toe, who had known Eric in happier days at the Point, made vehement personal appeal to the management and succeeded in having it stopped. It was the *Palla-*

dium's policy when discrediting Langdon to refer to "the unimpeachable verdict of brother officers, gentlemen of unstained honor, which had cast him from the fold." Now it needed circumstantial instances with which to impeach these same brother officers of unstained honor, and, who more likely to be in possession of numerous interesting facts or in readiness to part with them *seriatim* than the "Kicked-Out Captain," now needy, impoverished, and presumably sore-hearted? It was a reporter who brought Langdon the message that Mr. Manager wished to have a little talk with him, and Langdon went, silently took the chair to which he was affably waved after the preliminary tender of the handshake and smoke, which the guileless Indian and the enterprising business man alike regard as indispensable to a council preparatory to mischief. Langdon listened without a word to a monologue that speedily became halting and embarrassed, for the blue-gray eyes looked straight into the shifting orbs behind the steel-rimmed spectacles, and under that silent, steady gaze the manager stumbled more and more, ending abruptly with, "Well, I merely suggest this. It is a line of work we thought you might care to take up. In your experience you must have encountered many and many a case that would

substantiate the views we have expressed, and now that you are out of it all, and very unjustly, as we are informed, you probably wouldn't mind giving us the benefit of—of what you know."

"What I know of the officers of the army," said Langdon, rising, "is just the opposite of what you publish. In the one case out of twenty where you meet with a cad it is simply another instance of the exception proving the rule, which is that almost all their number are gentlemen,—men of honor, conscience, and character. I do not thank you for your offer. Good-morning, sir."

"Your friend's a damned Quixotic fool," said the managing editor to his subordinate that night. "But if you can get him to come and dine with me at the Union League, do it. Bring him to-night if possible. I'd like to know more of him," which goes to show that the policy of a paper and the honor and conscience of a man are two very far different things. Eric wouldn't dine at the club. He said he could no longer get into his dress clothes, which was true, for he had sold them for one-third their value and one-tenth their cost. A yard-master had no need of such toggery, he thought, but that was when he never dreamed that he should so soon lose that position—or ever gain one infinitely higher.

CHAPTER XII

THE summer was going fast. The "Big Horn" was pushing on towards the wide Northwest. The "Seattle" was grading the Sweetwater Valley through far Wyoming. Brentwood shops were thronged with busy, grimy men. Brentwood elevators were bursting with grain. Brentwood's streets were bustling with shoppers. Both railways were running to the full capacity every car they owned and many they didn't, but had pressed into service unbeknownst to the owners as strays from the Burlington, the U. P., the St. Paul, the Northwestern, and a dozen different alphabetical combinations descriptive of railway corporations in the wide West. Brentwood banks had never done such a business. Red Water farms were shedding mortgages as horses shed their winter coats. Some farmers were even clipping coupons with the wool from the backs of their sheep. An era of prosperity seemed to have dawned on the smiling Nebraska Valley. All business, said the *Banner*, was booming. The coffers of the rival roads were filled with earnings,—but the hearts of their people with discontent. On account of

hard times the previous year a ten per cent. cut had been ordered in all wages and brought on the disastrous strike. The roads had won. The hands had lost, and sadly accepted the inevitable on the promise that, when business warranted, the old rate would be restored. Business couldn't be better than it was when September came, but a deaf ear was turned to all hints as to the restoration of the rates. Winter would soon come. Coal, clothes, groceries, and provisions were commanding high prices. Everybody had prospered except the operatives of the railways, and they and their families made up nearly half the population of Brentwood. Then came the walking delegates, conferences with local officials, responses that expenses exceeded receipts, vast sums were needed for extension and repair, then much talk pro and con in the papers, frequent meetings, fiery speeches, and then—threats.

Another kind of meeting was held in Brentwood one night. Bankers and business men with large interests at stake saw in the situation the exact symptoms which preceded the fierce outbreak of the previous year. The police reported tramps and "toughs" again gathering in force from all over the West, and this time, said the orator of the day at a vast open-air

concourse of the employés of both roads, "when we strike it will be with no such faltering, misguided hand as in the year gone by. The blow will be instantaneous. The scab will find his occupation gone. There will be no engine left for him to run the bread from our hungry children. There will be only smoking ruins to greet the coming of those hireling butchers,—the despised soldiery of either State or nation." Certain few of the railway men who had joined the Brentwood Rifles in the days of Perrigo's popularity were warned by anonymous letters to themselves, or to their timid wives and children, to drop that association at once or take the consequences. Most of them applied for discharge and were refused. Nothing remained for them but to deliberately absent themselves from drills, refuse to pay the fines, and, under the laws, be dishonorably expelled "for the good of the service." But the Rifles had lost heart and interest. One of the officers had resigned. Most of their membership preferred paying fines to attending drills at which they learned nothing, and Gunnison men came up, looked, and snickered. "When that blow comes," said Mr. Banker Perrigo, in excited speech at the business men's meeting, "we shall be absolutely without protection, for our sheriff has been re-

placed by one who is the open sympathizer of the strikers (which was true), and our one company of militia, thanks to who knows what insidious influence, is reduced to a mere handful." A vehement discussion followed, winding up with an astonishing attack at the hands of the ablest lawyer in Brentwood.

"That our one company has dwindled to a handful is as true as that its demoralization is due to no insidious influence whatever, but to the most regrettable interference of Mr. Per-rigo himself, whose gold bought the captaincy for an utter incompetent, and sold out the one man who deserved our whole support and gratitude, the man who alone was capable of putting and keeping that company up to the standard, and whose treatment by the officials of the road he so gallantly and faithfully served, and, not to put too fine a point upon it, by this community also, is reproach unutterable to both."

Coming from a man who had been to Congress from Kentucky and hoped to get there from Nebraska, these were bitter words; but most tonics are bitter, and Brentwood swallowed, reflected, and profited. Colonel Cresswell, as he was called, in deference to the fact that he held no commission, but had served in the war, was not yet on the subsidized list of

the "Seattle," but as a rapidly rising lawyer he would doubtless soon find his price,—railways, like other big corporations, employing only the best professional talent where the law is concerned. Colonel Cresswell, to use his own terms, had "cottoned" to Langdon from the start. He admired his grit the day of the riots. He admired his drill when he handled the Rifles. He liked what the yardmen said of him and what Boniface told. He deprecated the language of the local press, but he was not yet firmly established in his profession, and might need their aid if he ran for office, so he could not openly take issue with the papers. But he knew of the threats of the bad element among the men, the envy and jealousy of certain of the young aspirants for promotion on the road, and before that mysterious safe robbery he had been keeping an eye on Langdon, giving him occasional word of cheer, occasional hint of warning. Ever since the robbery and Langdon's sad departure from their midst he had been ceaselessly and secretly at work in the effort to detect the guilty parties. He had his theories and was bent on pushing them through.

Another gathering of business men followed within a week, called for by most alarming resolutions at the biggest mass-meeting yet held

in Brentwood. Bonfires had burned in the public square and great orators of the labor party spoke in the silence of the September evening to thousands of listening, eager ears, and ceased amid thunderous applause. "Where is your Mr. Langdon?" anxiously queried the mayor in a swift aside to Mr. Cresswell that night.

"In Sioux City, slaving at a shilling an hour—teaching," was the answer.

"Well, get him out here quick. I can't give him anything in my office, as you well understand, but *you* can, and we'll make up a purse if I have to go down into my pockets for every cent of it."

And so it happened that Eric Langdon, whiter, thinner in face and even shabbier in raiment than when he left, came back to Brentwood and, after a conference where only five men were present, Cresswell, Boniface, Armstrong, the editor, and Bingham, the mayor, the returned wanderer took a desk in Cresswell's anteroom and took up again the study of law to which he had been devoting his evenings. Then Perrigo senior was advised to induce his son to resign the captaincy of the Brentwood Rifles. He wouldn't. "All right," said certain merchants. "Our money won't be safe here if the mob gets another start.

We'll transfer our accounts to Omaha." Perrigo "wilted" in less than a week. The resignation went in to the governor, and amidst a pounding on the floor of shod rifle-butts and loud clapping of hands from the seats, Mr. Langdon, clad in his old fatigue uniform, took command of the Rifles by invitation, and at once resumed drills. That night it was resolved to have three drills a week until the company caught up again. The next week forty men responded to roll-call and twelve applied for membership. The first week in October a business meeting was held and a telegram read announcing that Perrigo's resignation, which had unaccountably hung fire, was at last accepted. Langdon was unanimously elected captain and the certificate forwarded to the capital. The second week came without the expected commission, but the *Sun* announced that, as the election was held before the vacancy officially existed, it was therefore illegal. Try it again, said "the boys," and then came an embarrassed adjutant-general to suggest that it perhaps would be best not to insist on the election of Mr. Langdon. With the kindest feeling for him in the world, the governor could not see his way clear to giving him a commission. Indeed, the *Sun* and *Examiner* shrieked that the community never would stand

it. A political adviser told the executive he would lose the vote of Brentwood, and an anonymous letter or two informed him his grave was dug and the corpse should be ready if ever he touched pen to parchment with the name of Eric Langdon on it. No wonder the governor sent his adjutant-general to consult with "the boys." But now "the boys" had got their blood up. No Perrigo dollars were forthcoming to boil it down, and the shout went up, "Langdon or nobody," and the adjutant-general left in a huff.

Then came State Senators Brent and Foster to see Colonel Cresswell, who was "opposing the administration" even though politically in accord. It was an off year for the Legislature and the eyes of many a senatorial possibility were following the tottering footsteps of a silvery-haired statesman who would probably never resume his seat in the senatorial tank at the north wing at Washington. The vacancy would be filled by the governor, and who, said these gentlemen in the confidence of the executive,—who so likely to succeed to the toga as the brilliant and distinguished Colonel Cresswell, provided he did not kill his own chance by further embarrassing the governor? Cresswell bit. "It would put the governor in the *rôle* of an intimidator," said the emissaries, "to

openly commission Mr. Langdon. Of course we may need him and all that, and have every appreciation of him, but it won't do to fly in the face of the people. Let them think they are having their way, but quietly, you understand, work things so as to have ours." And Cresswell was at least a sufficiently profound statesman to see the political wisdom of their position, especially when coupled with that hint as to the senatorial succession. So he conferred with Langdon, and saw and talked with "the boys," one or two at a time. Every business body seemed to feel by this time they must have Langdon to instruct and command their company, but the few in the confidence of the administration knew that in the present condition of affairs he could never be commissioned. Langdon saw it himself, smiled, and after the politicians had talked until they were tired and the boys remained obdurate, arose in meeting, said twenty words, and solved the problem. "I withdraw as a candidate for captain and submit my name as a recruit," said he. There was a moment of amazement and silence. Then a burst of applause. Then somebody in the confidence of Langdon moved the rules be suspended, a ballot taken at once, and Mr. Langdon was declared unanimously elected to membership. He

signed the enlistment papers already prepared, was sworn in and announced as a private in the Brentwood Rifles amid the tumultuous cheers of that gallant organization. Then First Sergeant Potts arose and smilingly said he'd served a good while in that capacity, liked the company, liked the job, and wanted to learn more about it. The best way to learn was to watch it properly done by an expert. "We've learned that by experience," said he, and therefore asked as a favor to be allowed to drop the lozenge from over his chevron and fall back to a vacancy among the duty sergeants, and then called upon the presiding officer of the meeting and commanding officer of the company to name as his successor the man of all others he and the company believed best fitted to fill the bill, and got no further, for the boys "caught on," as they said, and further remarks were drowned in an uproar of applause, in the midst of which the lieutenant commanding, the old first sergeant, and the new first sergeant, Langdon, were shouldered and borne in triumph about the room, and the reporters of the *Examiner* and *Sun* rushed to their respective offices.

It was useless now for the *Sun* to hurl denunciation at the governor or at the Rifles. The law was supreme. Only the governor could

make Langdon an officer, but even the governor could not make him a sergeant. The law gave the appointment of sergeants and corporals to the commanding officer of the company alone, and while Governor X. would not oppose the wishes of so many citizens and voters by granting Langdon a commission, neither would he interpose against the wishes of scores of others by demanding, as urged by the *Sun* and the strikers, "the resignation of the insolent officer who had dared to thwart the wishes of a community." The *Banner* rejoiced and applauded. The *Examiner* was silent. The "Seattle" might need that company any moment, and every man with mob law in view, and every citizen pledged to law and order, knew instantly what it meant that the Rifles had failed to fill the vacancies. The lieutenant commanding would figure as head of the company, but its instruction, its discipline, the work of preparation, and finally its command in the event of a fight, would all devolve upon its gritty first sergeant, Eric Langdon.

Two evenings later, Cresswell, with anxious eyes, looked up at the window of the second-story room over his offices on Thayer Street, the main thoroughfare of Brentwood. It was after ten, but all was darkness there, and Lang-

don's invariable rule was to return at once from drill and go early to bed, for, winter or summer, he was an early riser. The clerk and assistant who formerly occupied those humble quarters had married, moved west to the Hills and thrown out his own shingle, and Langdon thankfully had moved in. The street was still alive with people, but the lights in the Rifles armory, two blocks away, had been extinguished before the stroke of ten at the city hall. In his hand Cresswell held a crumpled half-sheet of note-paper that had reached him through the mail. It contained only the words: "Your man laughs at warning and defies the people. If he hasn't left this town by midnight he'll never get a chance again."

By midnight—and it was now after ten. Only that morning in reminding Langdon that the chief of police had not only issued permission, but advised him to go armed, Cresswell had asked him if more warnings had reached him, and the new first sergeant took from his breast-pocket a little note. It was a woman's hand that penned this one: "For God's sake don't disregard this. You do not know what minute may be your last if you insist on staying here. These men are desperate." Cresswell had read it with compressed lips, and advised its being given at

once to the police. Far and wide the edict of the employés had gone forth. If assurance that the old wages would be restored from and after November 1 failed to reach them by noon October 28, every man would quit work and no man would be allowed to attempt it. More than once Cresswell had noticed strange, unprepossessing faces among the loiterers along the block. More than once men had called on one pretext or other at the office and were furtively interested in the survey of the premises, but the police well knew the bar-room blackguards who had threatened vengeance on Langdon for his interference in behalf of the soldier they were beating to a jelly, and in person, at least, they dared not act. "It isn't among the slums alone you have enemies, Langdon," said Cresswell. "The bitterest foes a man has to guard against are those who have done him injury, and the men I'm after are those who put up that safe robbery and gained your discharge. Oh, for an hour of Channing!"

But that was vain. Channing, he who commanded the respect and confidence of the yards and shops of the "Big Horn," was sauntering discontentedly in the Riviera, doing as his doctors bid, utterly homesick, utterly unable to appreciate or understand what he saw, and only

wishing himself back in the cab of a Baldwin, whirling "the Limited" over the prairie sixty miles an hour. Channing knew every mother's son in the Brentwood yards by name. The new incumbent knew not one of them. Channing argued, Burleigh bullied, and clash was inevitable. The management of both roads had announced in unequivocal terms that they would not yield to the demands of the men. The mayor of Brentwood was sorely frightened. The governor had been appealed to to order troops to the scene and overawe the would-be strikers, and very properly refused,—it being our good American policy in dealing with enemies or insurgents, white, red, or brown,—mobs, Indians, or Tagalogs, never to show fight until practically forced into it. The railway companies in anticipation of the strike had gathered some hundreds of workmen across the Missouri ready to be rushed by special train to Brentwood, but neither police, *posses*, nor militia had been mobilized.

Pondering anxiously over the situation, Cresswell was walking slowly homeward up Thayer Street. He had been talking with the mayor and certain city fathers at the Brentwood and now wished to see Langdon, but Langdon, evidently, wasn't home, and the town clock had

struck the quarter. The office door was closed and doubtless locked, and Cresswell's keys were in his work-a-day pockets at the house. Confident of meeting Langdon, he strolled on towards the armory, and became suddenly aware of the division superintendent of the "Big Horn" talking with two of the boys. Cresswell didn't like that official, but for reasons of his own preferred to make much of him. He stopped and held out his hand.

"Oh, good-evening, Mr.—er—ah—Colonel Cresswell," stammered the railway man, in some confusion. "I didn't see you,—I'm glad to see you. Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Langdon? I've knocked and hammered at the office, and these gentlemen say that he went straight home half an hour ago."

"It is true," said one of the young soldiers. "I saw him go in there just before ten o'clock."

"Odd!" said Cresswell. "Suppose we walk over, Mr. Superintendent."

They did, and they knocked and hammered for two minutes without response, and then Cresswell bethought him of the rear door. "You wish to see him personally?" queried he of the official, with doubt in his tone.

"Yes. The road sent me an important message. I may as well tell you,—confidentially,

of course. They want him to go to that meeting that's in full blast at this minute. They think the men will listen to him."

"I see," said Cresswell, with sarcastic emphasis. "Having kicked him out into the cold for another man's crime, they want him to help them out of another scrape. You must feel gratified at being the bearer of such a message. However, come on. We'll try the back."

An alley parallel with Thayer Street divided the block, and Cresswell's office buildings covered about half the lot. Wood, coal, and ice were delivered by way of that alley, which accounted for the worn path to the open cellar-way, but not for the footprints in the snow on the steps leading up to the back door. Cresswell tried the knob and the door was fast, but who left the cellar steps uncovered? "Have you a gun?" he asked, and the superintendent faltered "Yes."

Gripping his own revolver, a faithful friend of Kentucky days, Cresswell cautiously descended the steps and felt his way through the dampness and dark. He had no match, and lighting would only reveal him to prowlers, if there were any. He knew the premises thoroughly, and quickly reached the lower hall and the stairway to the ground-floor above him. It

was dark as Erebus, and he, breathing heavily, felt his way up the creaking flight until within reach of the top. Then something fell with stunning force on his head, a thousand meteors flashed and danced before his eyes, and he went crashing back the way he came, bounding, rolling, and sliding till he brought up, senseless and bleeding, at the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

NOON of October 28 struck on the deep-toned bell of the city hall,—Brentwood's pride,—and sharp at the sound every hand in the railway shops, sheds, and yards followed suit and went out. So did the fires in the furnaces in the course of the night, for no man succeeded in getting in to replenish them. So did *not* the trains, freight or passenger, on either "Big Horn" or "Seattle," for the rails were a lather of soap, the boilers a reek of foam. The casualty list in the motive power showed twenty-three engines "killed," and the only wheels to revolve, east or west, were those trundling the United States mail,—the operatives, with calm sagacity, offering no objection to the running of postal cars, yet firmly opposing everything else. Following the traditions of the "Big Horn," the new general manager appeared promptly on the scene, while he of the "Seattle" sniffed the battle from afar and stayed there. Mr. Burleigh came to threaten and command, was promptly hoisted aboard a baggage-car and bidden to address the meeting from the rear platform, which he essayed to do, the car speedily gliding away with

him to the accompaniment of much derision and many decided cat-calls, not to mention a few defunct quadrupeds and doubtful eggs. Mr. Burleigh was given a sample of the running qualities of the fast mail down the winding gorge of the Red Water, and spent the night in blasphemy and bitterness of spirit at Gunnison. Not even a farmer's buckboard could he find to take him back. He wired for the train-loads of substitutes across the Big Muddy, and they were ditched ten miles from any town and had to build bonfires out of the wreck until that was used up, and then kept warm with a few miles of snow-fence that unaccountably went up in flames. The "Seattle" sent sixty Pinkertons on a special, and thereby precipitated a sympathetic strike across the Missouri and the special into the shallows near the eastern shore, well up to the Pinkertons' middle. When finally rescued these amateurs were roosting on car-roofs, cold, wet, and bedraggled, an object of charity to the countryside. Then came the order for troops, long withheld, and before it was issued the Brentwood Rifles knew there would be no first sergeant to call the roll. Somewhere about midnight of the 27th, dazed and bleeding, Colonel Cresswell had staggered into the street in front of his office, feebly calling for help. The

police found a pool of blood at the foot of the cellar stairs and splashes all along from near the top, but not a sign of struggle elsewhere, and not a trace of Eric Langdon. Along towards morning Cresswell managed to tell his story, and then the police went and routed out the division superintendent, who told a queer tale. When the doctors heard it they looked oddly at each other and agreed that it were best that Cresswell shouldn't hear it until he was stronger. It might unduly excite him now. Cresswell said he left the superintendent, Mr. Betts, on guard at the cellar stairway in the back yard, revolver in hand, and that he should have seen his, Cresswell's, assailants when they made their escape at the rear, the only way they could have gone. The superintendent said he had met Mr. Cresswell casually on the street, inquired for Mr. Langdon, and went with Cresswell to the office to find him. They knocked until they believed that Langdon couldn't be there, and he, the superintendent, desired to search elsewhere, but Cresswell was somewhat persistent that Betts should wait while he went round and tried the back way. Betts went just to oblige the colonel, as he "didn't like to offend him." The fact was he noticed that the colonel had been drinking a little, and at such times, as was well

known, the Kentuckian was apt to be a bit dictatorial and to take offence rather easily. Betts said he knew the colonel had been at the bar of the Brentwood that evening and, after waiting a few minutes, just to assure himself the colonel was safely within, he hurried away about his own business. Had he heard no sound of fall or struggle? was asked. Not a sound of that kind. He had heard some one moving about in the hall and thought, of course, it was the colonel. In fact, *sotto voce*, he added he thought so still, and that under the circumstances the colonel might later have missed his footing and fallen headlong. It could not be conceived possible that Mr. Langdon would brutally assault his friend and benefactor.

Now, Cresswell had taken three or four nips of his favorite beverage that evening, but Boniface swore he was perfectly himself when he left the Brentwood. That might be, said the shrewd and somewhat envious lawyer employed by the "Big Horn" as counsel, and yet might he be "under alien influence." One of two theories, said the railway lawyer, could be derived from the facts, and only two. Mr. Cresswell had fallen down-stairs under the influence of one of two forces,—Bourbon or a blow. If a blow, who gave it but Eric Langdon? No one

else was known to have entered those doors that night. In all the tense, pent-up excitement attending the inevitable strike this incident was discussed with bated breath. Men who knew Cresswell and saw him that night knew he was not so far gone in liquor as to fall down-stairs, and therefore believed the story of assault. Men who knew Langdon swore he was incapable of assaulting Cresswell. What could possibly be his motive? The safe stood securely locked. Desks and drawers were intact. There were no reasons why Langdon should go except the threats—which he held in contempt—and every reason why he should stay. The railway lawyer hinted at renewal of proceedings by Per-rigo's bank to recover certain sums with interest. The bank, however, being questioned, reluctantly testified that that incident was closed, satisfactory settlement having been made, and so it had in Langdon's behalf by the big-hearted Kentuckian and his friend the mayor. No, nothing but threats against Langdon's life could be heard of as a cause of Langdon's disappearance,—nothing whatever until the second day of the strike, when two people appeared who said that if guaranteed protection they would tell something. The something proved to be that an open two-horse wagon drove into the

alley just before ten o'clock, and drove out again about ten-forty, when it had two more men in it, who were bending over something in the bottom. These two jumped out when it reached the street. They went one way, the wagon the other. Then uprose the solid men of Brentwood, save the few whose souls were mortgaged to the "Seattle" or whose notes were falling due at Perrigo's, and at a meeting held just after dark the first check was given to the wide-spreading sympathy felt for the strikers throughout the community. Up to this moment they had practically carried all before them. Property had been carefully guarded by the details from their own number. People had been treated with civility even if denied means of transportation. They were determined, they said, to do nothing to forfeit the good-will of friends and fellow-citizens. Their grievance was Brentwood's and their oppressors the rival railways. Violence of any kind, said the strike leaders, would be tolerated only as a last resort. Yet here was evidence that even before beginning the strike assault, abduction, possibly murder, could be laid at the strikers' doors. Cresswell still lay in grievous plight and Eric Langdon could not be found. Then evidence began to accumulate. A two-horse farm wagon such as described was seen by other citi-

zens driving westward towards the open prairie. A farmer came in and said that such a wagon stopped at the ford close to his place about midnight. His wife woke him, saying there was something wrong down at the barn, the horses were stamping and snorting. He hurried thither and found everything secure, but could have sworn he saw a light dancing away from the barn in the direction of the ford as he issued from the house. Curiosity, therefore, led him to investigate, and surely enough he heard voices. Two men were talking in low tones. One of their horses had picked up a stone, and, so tightly was it wedged, they couldn't get it out. He gathered that one of them had been to the barn in hopes of finding a pick. The farmer was on the point of hailing them when the whistle of the night freight sounded away down the valley towards Brentwood, and he heard one of them say, "My God! There's Number 8 now, and we can't flag her this side of the bridge!" Then, apparently speaking to some one within the wagon, continued, "Now, lie still if you value your life, —— you! Jump in, Jim, quick!" And with that the horses were lashed to a run and they clattered away up the pike in the darkness. About ten minutes later he heard the freight rumbling along up the valley, and

after it had almost got beyond hearing distance to the west there came the short, quick single whistle, the signal for brakes. That must have been somewhere about the long bridge at the big bend. That was something unusual, and coupled with what he heard the men say, it excited his suspicion. Then when his copy of the *Banner* told him about Langdon's disappearance he felt sure what it all meant, and therefore came in to Brentwood to tell his tale. And it was this that brought confusion to Betts and the Brentwood strikers, for it was now evident that Langdon had been spirited away.

That foul means and force had been resorted to no one who knew Langdon could doubt. That railwaymen were the perpetrators the words overheard by Farmer Hawley gave presumptive evidence, and that the abducted man was sorely needed developed in the course of that very night.

Observant of his counsel, the Rifles at the first intimation of another strike had kept a guard at the armory, and this guard was increased to a lieutenant and twenty men at noon on the 28th. Moreover, it was made up of men who would fight, and the scouts of the strikers sent to reconnoitre and report on the feasibility of again seizing the arms and equipments, returned

and "reported adversely." Two days later, determined to wipe out the stain of their military misadventure the previous year, full sixty members promptly assembled at the call and awaited orders at the armory, and still, barring the banishment of Mr. Burleigh in one direction and the presumable taking off of Langdon in the other, no deed of damage or violence had been charged to the strike. The sheriff had eagerly accepted the theory that Langdon himself was Cresswell's assailant, and had fled to escape consequences. This "made him solid" with the strikers and warranted a certain inaction. But now the business men had taken matters in hand. The *Banner* "ripped him up the back," as his friends expressed it, and the governor himself was on his way to Brentwood, coming up from the capital by a cross-country spur of the U. P., and matters were nearing a climax. The Grays were at the station at Gunnison waiting for the troop-train with Major McConville and four companies feeling its cautious way over culvert and trestle from the Missouri. If the strikers refused to disperse at the beck of the governor, would they flinch from the prick of the bayonet? That was the absorbing question. The mayor said yes. The men thundered no, and Brentwood held its breath and waited.

Meantime, the orders for the Rifles were to sleep on their arms at their quarters. It was the policy of wisdom.

And now, "If no new complications arise," said the mayor, "we can hope for a quiet night; but, it's the calm before the storm. I wonder if that train's in with their reënforcements from up the road."

"I'll telephone and ask," said Boniface, leading the way into the rotunda.

It was filled with men, talking in low, cautious tones, glancing nervously about from group to group. Many were strike sympathizers; several were law and order men; most were desirous of being considered neutral. The strong men of the anti-strike party, irrespective of politics, had attended the meeting and came out in the wake of Boniface and the mayor. A little squad of reporters bore down on them at once, but Boniface begged them to wait, and escorted the mayor behind the desk and rang up the superintendent of the "Big Horn." A quavering voice answered that the superintendent wasn't there. "Is that train in with those people from Rosebud and the other stations?" asked Boniface, and people began edging up to the desk to listen. "What?—I don't hear you," said Boniface again. "Isn't in! Why, they

said they were due before dark. Where were they when you last heard? Wha-at? You haven't heard? Lines cut?—Where?—Repeat that, will you? Who's cut? Had to wait for women! What women? I don't understand."

By this time half the men in the lobby had gathered about the desk. What was that about women? No women were needed. It was no place for them here. They should be at their firesides taking care of the children and the household, while husbands and fathers hurried down to help the cause of Brentwood. Here was the seat of war; here the heart of the battle; here must the fight be won or lost again. And the unions had summoned all who could possibly come, even from the far Black Hills, to haste by special train and join their brethren on the battle-line. For over fifty miles the "Big Horn" paralleled the southern verge of the big Sioux Reservation. Just across the Dakota boundary it lay, and half the westbound freight the road carried beyond the Red Water was for the agents or the traders at Rosebud, at Pine Ridge, Sheridan, and certain other points of distribution and supply. Around those guarded lines, winter and summer, there éver hovered dozens of dissolute whites, seeking to prey on

the red man. Pirates of the Plains were these fellows, reckless and outlawed, and more than one hideous outbreak of the Sioux had been traced to their nefarious deeds. Whiskey was their stock in trade, and many an untutored savage in exchange for a bottle had parted with robes, rifle, and pony as well as his senses. Conflict was frequent. Troops were few. There had been bad blood between the Indians and certain settlers along the Chaduza all summer. In September two herders were found scalped and mutilated just one week after Spotted Elk and Iron Voice, two young braves of the Brulé tribe, had been slain in a drunken row with a party of prairie tramps not ten miles from Rosebud. The agent said he could restrain and control the Sioux provided the governor would take charge of the settlers, but settlers have votes; Indians have not; and the governor would do nothing to intimidate the sovereigns of the soil. The murderers of the Indians, though well known, were still unwhipped of justice, and bragging about the frontier saloons of their cowardly deed. The commanding officer of the little cavalry post not far from the Rosebud agency wired that the Indians were dancing night after night and holding big pow-wows. There was trouble ahead for somebody. The despatch reached

Washington the day the Pinkertons and trainloads of outside workmen were dumped into the ditch,—the very day, moreover, that brought the appeal for troops to protect property and open the roads. The answer to the frontier fort was a telegram ordering the post with its women and children to be left “with a suitable guard” and the commanding officer, with all available men (he had only three troops of cavalry, averaging fifty-five effective each), to march at once to Banner Butte, the western terminus of the Yankton road, and there take train for Omaha. This left the fort to be held by the post-quartermaster and some twenty-three men, when runners came with troubled eyes to say the Sioux would “jump” before the setting of the sun.

Much of this had been told in the local papers, but, so engrossed was everybody in the strike, that little attention was paid to it. Like a thunder-clap from a clear sky, therefore, fell the next announcement from the lips of Boniface, as he turned with almost ashen face upon the silent throng. “My God!” he said, “the Sioux have swooped on Rosebud Station and scalped every soul in the place! There was no train to bring the troops from Robinson.”

"How about that other train,—the special with the men?" gasped a burly engineer.

"Cut off somewhere back of Rosebud. Only a few of them have guns, and they're praying for help. The Rifles are ordered there as fast as cars can take 'em. The strike's off."

CHAPTER XIV

MORN of the last day of the month was breaking, clear, keen, and sparkling. The ruddy glow of the Orient heaven, the paling fires of the westward stars, the serene, steady watch-light of the great planet, pilot of the sun, high perched above the sharply outlined ridge towards the turbid Missouri, all told of the speedy coming of "the King of Day rejoicing in the east." Over the wide prairies of Illinois, the rolling hills of Iowa, the slanting, dazzling sunbeams broke in glory, but even such glory failed to rend the pall of gloom and despond that covered the broad lands of the Red Water. A night of terror was changing to a day of dread. The last news before the wires themselves went down long, long miles away, was that the train bearing the strikers' reinforcements,—sons, brothers, comrades of the federated workmen of the Brentwood shops, bearing, too, the refugees, men, women, and children, from ranch and farm and hamlet along the Niobrara,—had left Channing Station at dusk and was held up or cut off somewhere west of ruined Rosebud,—God and the Indians alone could tell just where. At seven-

thirty "Channing" had wired that the Sioux war-parties were seen at dusk coming westward at the gallop, and at eight-thirty the wires ceased to work west of Castle Butte, an isolated station nearly thirty miles east of the ravaged settlement and full one hundred and fifty west of Brentwood. For over fifty miles, as has been said, the line of the "Big Horn" paralleled the south border of the Sioux Reservation, but farther to the west it pierced the old treaty lands along the White Earth and ran long leagues through the former hunting-grounds of the Ogalallas, whose young men never lost a chance of emulating any savage exploits of the Brulés. Beginning at Brentwood, the strike spirit flew east and west along the lines of the "Big Horn" and the "Seattle." Beginning among the illicit grogeries along the Mini Chaduza, the revolt of the Brulés spread with the speed of wildfire through the Indian villages upon the Dakota border until it overwhelmed the power of the agency close at hand as well as those to the west in Wyoming. The first dash of the young braves was at the originators of the mischief, the outlaws of the prairie, who discreetly fled, burying such of their stock in trade as they could not carry with them, all too easily to be trailed and dug up by the Sioux.

Then, drink-maddened and balked of their desires, the band had sacked the agency, released their imprisoned brothers, and swooped southward on the helpless ranchers of the Niobrara. In frantic appeal for aid the station agent at Rosebud wired west to Fort Robinson, since their usual protectors were now far away along the Missouri. The answer was prompt, to the effect that the troops would start the instant train could take them, and then, alas, too late it was found that in making up that big "special" for the reënforcements for the strikers they had sent away the one serviceable engine between Frayne Station at the west and Brentwood. By the time the cars sent whirling from Frayne could reach Robinson every soldier was needed there, for the Pine Ridge Sioux had risen to a man. Robinson itself was threatened, while Rosebud Station, to the east, had been reduced to ashes. No wonder a pall had spread over Brentwood. Scores of its sons and many of its daughters were scattered in little stations of the "Big Horn" or in farms and ranches all along that perilous borderland, and the only words to reach the sorely anxious hearts at home came from terrified refugees at Castle Butte, declaring every ranch, farm, and station burned and pillaged for over a hundred miles along the road,

their hapless, helpless people either massacred or fleeing to the refuge of the sand-hills to the south.

And now, as Boniface had said, the strike was done. At nine the previous night the wail had come from the threatened stations at the west, and men who at sunset were blocking the way against every car that carried troops were now straining every nerve to send them on. At one o'clock, hurried aboard the waiting train of the "Big Horn" in the Brentwood yards, the Rifles went whirling away through the night, followed by the prayers and tears of a whole populace, and reënforced by full a hundred stalwart men, strikers of the day before, all armed, all bound for Rosebud and rescue of that imperilled train, with not one man in fifty of the military company, not one in ten of the railway party, who had had any experience whatever in Indian fighting. Old hands of the road had had some long-range skirmishes while track-laying. Some of the engineers' assistants could tell stirring tales of the days of the survey, but only two or three of the Rifles had ever seen an armed and mounted Indian warrior; many hoped they might never have to. Yet, here they were, sixty men, who under proper leadership would give good account of themselves in action against a civil-

ized foe, setting forth to meet the most scientific fighters in creation, and Lieutenant Hunt, lawyer and loyal citizen, frankly stated that he would be glad to hand over his sword to any one who understood the business and he'd take a rifle and a place in the ranks. Oh, for Eric Langdon now!

Sixty, seventy, eighty miles they ran without either news or warning, the silent engineer peering ever grimly forward through the night, one hand at the throttle, the other at the reverse lever. In the cab rode the assistant superintendent. In the forward cars were other officials and scores of stalwart men, lately heading the strike. Hunt for a time had been with them, but a veteran conductor took him aside. "We are pulling together now," said he, "but of course brotherhood matters can't be discussed in the presence of—outsiders, and there are matters that must be talked over. We'll let you know whatever news we get at every stop." The conductor's words were significant, so were his eyes. Hunt took the hint and his leave, slipping back to the second car, where half the Rifles were sprawling on the seats, the other half occupying the third. Six times the crowded train had stopped at stations and six times rushed on again. "Nothing further from any reliable

source," said the conductor. "Only more horrible rumors and stories from refugees wired in from Castle Butte." Dawn came on apace and the train slowed down in answer to a lantern signal at the bridge over Shadow Creek. Two men tumbled aboard after excited hail to the occupants of the cab, and the conductor presently came back, looked in at the door and jerked his head to Hunt, as much as to say "You're wanted." They were still twenty miles from the Buttes and had been running like mad. "There'll be a dozen old hands to join us next stop, lieutenant," said the official, "and all with Henrys or Winchesters. The train with the boys from the river," he continued, consulting certain telegrams, "is six hours behind us, and the U. P. has started a train with regulars from Omaha. Others from Kansas are coming by way of Fremont. There'll be soldiers enough by to-morrow, but—God help us through to-day!"

"Who are these who boarded us here?" asked the lieutenant.

"Some our fellows,—bridge guards, you know,—in case—the other thing had to be done."

"The Lord be praised it didn't!" said Hunt, piously. "If that bridge had been burned there

would have been no saving your special. We have men enough," he continued, thoughtfully, "if we only had the right kind of leader."

The conductor glanced about him and nodded reassuringly to one or two who were anxiously eying him and his uniformed companion.

"Mr. Hunt," said he, drawing the officer to a corner of the swaying baggage-car. "This is no time, is it, for discussing rights and wrongs? For a while, at least, the strike's a dead issue. We've *got* to pull together. No good can come of stirring up—what's past and gone. I've wired ahead to have coffee ready for two hundred men at the Buttes. It's a lunch station. We'll take the cans right aboard and shove ahead. That'll cheer the men up a bit, won't it?"

"Sure to," said Hunt, wondering what might be coming.

"Then—if a little farther beyond that—we happen to find—just the right sort of man to run this thing, don't you think your fellows would take him and no questions asked—until the whole business can be settled later?"

"By Jove! You mean Langdon!" cried Hunt, in hope and rejoicing.

"Sh-h! For God's sake don't shout! He's ahead all right enough, and safe and sound, but

he's fighting mad over this business. Some of the boys weren't advised right, and it's—kind of awkward all round," ended the conductor, guilelessly.

"I should say so, in view of Betts's charging him with being Cresswell's assailant and then running away," answered Hunt.

"Well, we'll fix Betts all right. But you and your boys don't want to stir up trouble now, do you? Let's pull together, as I say. Once away from Castle Butte then comes the run to Rosebud. The road's clear. The Indians have all gone westward, but God help those poor fellows in that train till we get there!"

"Amen! Amen all round," said Hunt. "The Rifles won't ask questions, if that's what you want. Only give us Langdon."

And forty minutes later, cheered and warmed by abundant hot coffee, the Rifles peered from the windows at the whistle for brakes, and a shout went up that well-nigh raised the roof. In the midst of a little group at the siding stood a pale-faced, stern-eyed man in the fatigue uniform of a first sergeant, and the Rifles, yelling like mad, tumbled headlong in a surging throng from the train, swarming about him in eager, impulsive greeting. Without a word he grasped Hunt's outstretched hand, signalled to the con-

ductor, and broke a way through the throng towards the hissing engine, taking in water at the windmill tank up the track. "We haven't an instant to lose," were then his first words. "Get everybody aboard and join me forward as soon as you can," said he to Hunt, linked his arm in that of the conductor and rushed him up the roadside to the pilot.

Another forty minutes and, the still smoking ruins of Rosebud Station left behind, the crowded train was speeding swiftly, yet cautiously, over the broad open westward prairie. Except a few famished, homeless dogs howling mournfully about the scene, not a living thing remained at the station, and only the ghastly relics of one human creature had been found in the brief, hurried, two-minute search. Already it was known far as the Atlantic that the first stories of massacre were grievously exaggerated,—many families reported murdered having made their way in panic but safety to Castle Butte, and others escaping to the south. But not a word from any source had come as to the special, the last news by wire being that the Ogalallas were dancing and howling about their agency at Pine Ridge and firing on the scouts sent out from Robinson. The Brulés could only be somewhere between Rosebud and Wounded

Knee. Wherever that luckless train could be found there would be the Indians in direful force and fury. Grave, set faces were those in the cab and about the engine and tender. The road ran straight for miles. The landscape was open and treeless and lay like a lazily rolling ocean turned suddenly to earth and stone. Langdon and the conductor, clinging fast each to a stanchion, were under the headlight above the pilot. A sergeant and three men, best shots of the Rifles, hampered the cab and tender, but the engineer felt safer in having them there, and the hope, pluck, and spirits of the whole train-load had gone up at a bound in the consciousness that that cool-headed, gritty ex-regular was at the front to take command. Hunt had brought his field-glass, and despite the jar and jolt as the huge engine clanked along over the elastic road-bed, Langdon searched the prairie ceaselessly while the conductor kept track of the mile-posts.

"We twist and turn every which way five miles farther on," shouted the latter into Langdon's ear. "That bluff ahead there marks the end of this tangent. Then we follow the creek a piece, and then make a streak cross country at the big bend."

"Any deep cuts there?" shouted Langdon in

reply, hanging to the iron bar with a hooked arm and still peering through the binocular.

"Four or five. Why?"

"That's where we'll find 'em. They'll run the train into a cut for protection, line the banks on both sides, and stand off the Sioux till help comes—if they can. Signal full speed to the engineer, will you? He can slow down again at the bend."

A moment more and the huge machine seemed rushing through space and the two men at the pilot bent double and hung on for dear life. Five minutes brought them once more along the banks of the stream and close to the frowning bluffs. "Watch them!" signalled Langdon, pointing to the crests and leaning far out from the side of the engine, now reducing speed. The sergeant, clamping his campaign hat to his head, nodded "I understand."

The bluffs were but the shoulder of a high ridge through which long centuries before the stream had torn its way. It hid like a curtain the spreading landscape beyond. It might be hiding hundreds of lurking warriors, but Langdon believed that though a few wary scouts would be thrown out to give warning of coming troops, the main body of savages were clustered close about the beleaguered train. He had never

before been brought into contact with mounted Indians, but had had long talks with comrades well schooled in border warfare, and felt sure of his ground. From what he could gather he believed that several old Indian-fighters from the westward stations must be on that train, and reasoned that they would make their defensive stand where the cars could be sheltered and they themselves, the defenders, be partially covered by the sides of the cut. He was reasonably certain that they could there hold out for his coming.

And now as they sweep cautiously round the long curve at the foot of the bluff and see before them, four miles ahead up the distant slope of the divide, the jagged seam of spaded earth and the black shadows of the snow-fence, and realize that all that stretch of winding grade must be overcome before they can hope for sight of the besieged, Langdon's heart throbs like the massive engine straining at its burden. "Hit her up again, Jimmy!" shouts the conductor, his hands forming a speaking-tube. The fireman is thrusting coal by the shovelful into the seething furnace. Inky smoke jets from the stack and streams tailwards over the train. "No hiding *our* coming, Cap!" yells the conductor, with a backward and upward glance. Langdon shakes his head.

"They've spotted us long before this," is the answer. Again the speed increases, despite reverse curves that hug the bank like the convolutions of a snake. "Jim" is gathering headway for the climb. Tilting far towards the stream, the black demon in the lead skims the shining concave of the rails under a low line of heights to the left, watched every inch of their length by the wary eyes of crouching sharpshooters in the tender. Then the steel roadway curves inboard again and whirls them around a projecting nose of bluff, and still Jim's hand never winces at the throttle, and under almost full pressure the huge drivers tear at the track, the gleaming rods flash at racing speed, spinning like fire-wheels, while in the swaying car behind men cling to seat-arms or are hurled from side to side in the fury of the chase. Now comes a long mile of easy grade as the line leaves the narrow river and begins the climb of the distant crest, and like a black meteor the "Big Horn's" powerful Baldwin shoots across the straining trestle over a shallow ravine and spins away in headlong dash, a dense volume of inky smoke and blinding dust whirling and billowing in its wake. Now the snow-fence to the north shuts out the landscape on the right flank. Now through low waves of prairie the pilot tears a

way. Now into the dark mouth of half a mile of snow-shed darts the engine, and the earth an instant later has swallowed up the train. Easy would it have been for savage skill to strip a few rails from the ties and hurl the human load to death, but not a Brulé dreamed of such a thing as "store soldiers" coming to dare them, with the regulars a full week's march away. Wide open now, the throttle releases every pound of steam, and all the strength of the mammoth tugs at the lagging load, for the long grade begins at last to tell, and despite all that man and steam and fire can do the dead weight trailing sternward overcomes the impetus of the initial dash, slows down to less than half-speed, but, still panting furiously, the engine struggles on. One mile more and the crest is gained, and then a new leap. One minute more and from the bowels of the earth the Baldwin bursts forth into glad sunshine, and peering instantly about him, sweeping the open slopes with eager eyes, Eric catches sight of a swift, streaming feather, skimming the crest to the south and shooting out of sight in the flash of a second. A war-bonnet, capping the painted head of a savage scout! The Brulés had got the alarm! "Back to the cab!" shouts the conductor. But Langdon motions "stay."

The ground breaks away in a little swale or hollow to the right front where the prairie begins its slope towards the far concave bend of the river, and over this rift there bursts upon their straining gaze a sight never to be forgotten. Away to the front there rises a billowy butte perhaps two miles distant, about one-half, probably, of its southward slope just visible, and that slope is thick sprinkled with darting, dashing red riders in wild commotion. There are the Sioux in all their savage glory! There, close at hand, must be the beleaguered train. Here, closer at hand, just behind the low curtain in front, must lurk the Brulé scouts. Look! A flash, a puff at the very crest, not four hundred yards away now, so determined has been the Baldwin's onward rush. Look! Another! And now there is not a second to lose. The Sioux have seen and opened fire. A shriek goes up from the brazen throat. The air-brakes grip the wheels. The long train slows so suddenly that men are hurled forward in every car. "Lie low, you in cab and tender!" yells Langdon, as the conductor, ducking, scrambles back to the shelter of the cab. Flash after flash, puff after puff, the ridge-line blazes. Spat comes a bullet on the iron breast behind him, as Langdon leaps from the pilot to the sloping ground and sprints

back along the side of the train just coming to a standstill. "This way! This side, Company 'C'!" he cries, waving his cap on high, his eyes flashing, his voice thrilling through the keen, exhilarating atmosphere. "Spread out! Open out—five yards apart! Forward!—fast as you can.—We've got to have that ridge before they can line it.—Come on! Come on!"

It is only a rush of a few hundred feet now. The eastward scouts of the hostiles are but a handful. The braves are closing in on every side about the weary defenders on the farther slope. The glut for blood and rapine has blinded the eyes of old Stabber, their fiery chief. The frantic signals of his scouts have been ignored in the fury of their assault, in the faith that all resistance will be over in another moment, and then, at the head of his wild warriors, he can dash in upon them in furious charge and the train, with its helpless women, its beaten, beseeching men, its screaming children making sweet music for his savage ears, will be the prey and spoil of the Brulé. In the din and crash of battle he never heeds the backward rush of the few warriors at the crest. He thinks them joining in the charge, till White Wolf, his son, topples headlong from his pony, gasping warn-

ing with his last breath,—till, yelling with mingled fury and dismay, a dozen braves bear down upon him at mad gallop and sweep him away to the safety of the west, for there, striding down the prairie slope, spreading out to right and left, comes the long, blue line of hated soldiery, backed up by scores of fighting men, all with crackling rifles. Here and there in little groups his warriors fire wildly in reply, but the defence, too, has again taken heart and, with exultant cheers, is pouring in hot fusillade. A dozen ponies are sprawled in death-agony upon the sward. Half a dozen gaudy braves are stricken, some even unto death. There is nothing for it but to scoop up the dead and dying brethren, and then to dash away for council at safe distance. And five minutes later, laughing, weeping, cheering, hand-shaking, embracing, five hundred men are mingled in joy and triumph about the bullet-riddled train. Women and children are sobbing in the arms of loved ones and scores of quivering lips are pouring praise and blessing on the name of Eric Langdon, and eager voices shouting and clamoring for him to show himself, and then hushing almost to silence, in awe, dismay, and wild anxiety. The last seen of him he was leaping along the railway far in

front of his line, waving and cheering them on. Had he, too, been snatched up in the smoke and dust and swept away by the Indian band? He had utterly disappeared. He could nowhere be found.

CHAPTER XV

IN the valley of the South Cheyenne and close to the rugged cliffs of the Black Hills a summer camp had been pitched, and nearly a thousand troops were under canvas. It was an ideal spot for such a purpose. A broad, high bench or plateau jutted out from the pine-covered heights at the northwest. The river lapped the base of the mile-wide *mesa* in sweeping semicircle south, southwest, and east, then rolled away in graceful bends through a placid, charming landscape until lost in the distance far to the northeast. Sparkling, frothing, rushing streams hemmed in the *mesa* on both sides and emptied their swirling torrent into the languid flood of the river. Springs of pure, almost ice-cold water leaped among the rocks in every ravine. Bunch-grass grew in thick, tempting tufts all over the foothills, whereon the horses thrived mightily. Antelope grazed in droves along the distant slopes, and, in the dark cañons back among the hills, the brooks fairly teemed with trout.

After four months of bitter weather—and experiences—guarding thousands of morose, sullen savages cowed into subjection after their

fiery outbreak, old "Cat" and his troopers were revelling in the poetry of soldier life in the field, and Melville with two of the batteries was keeping them company. They were far enough from the agencies to be free from daily contact with begging, bothersome Indians, and near enough to the railway to have daily supplies from the East. Mrs. Cat had taken a notion that she should of all things enjoy a summer under canvas, and even the assurance that it meant ruin to the complexion did not deter certain regimental beauties from following her example. "Cat" would have said no at the outset had he seen what it might lead to, but he didn't, and if he had, would probably have been overruled, Mrs. Cat being of mettle in all matters of domestic economy. She came, ordered an extra hospital tent pitched, and established her little court. Several experienced cavalry women speedily followed, and were soon snugly and happily bestowed in camp, the tents of the married officers being set at the northwest end of the *mesa*, close under the bold pine bluffs, and in June, when it was fully determined that the summer should be spent there by the field command, Melville took a week's leave, a run to Pawnee, and returned with Mrs. Melville, Miss Grahame, and the children, a proceeding that

gave much joy to Messrs. Woodrow and Santley, of the gunners, and to Captain Channing and certain other cavalry bachelors, for Ethel Grahame had won the honest admiration of all the men she knew, Channing and Santley especially. The best of wives are not always too well pleased to have their husband's maiden relatives as even semi-permanent residents under their roof, and Mrs. Melville could not be expected to fall below the standard of the best. She liked Ethel greatly, and persuaded herself that it was because of her liking she so earnestly wished Ethel would find a husband and a home of her own. Oddly enough, Miss Grahame, who was certainly over twenty,—many women said much over,—showed no disposition to hurry. Santley never seemed to attract her in the least. Channing she frankly liked, and had fairly beamed upon him for the fortnight following a certain conversation at the club that was told about the post, as such things will be told, to the end that Santley took jealous umbrage and said spiteful things and showed himself in a peevish, petulant vein that boded no good for his cause, whereas Channing took heart and became assiduous in his attentions until he, too, experienced some kind of a setback that made him surly at mess, and Mrs. Melville declared in con-

fidence to a devoted friend that Ethel had really wasted a whole year, and "you know," she continued, "though Ethel is a dear girl and I'm awfully fond of her, she can't afford to do that."

"Oh, indeed, no!" agreed Mrs. Cannon, and their opinion was but the cream of that of the entire feminine element of Pawnee, where the conviction was quite general that Ethel's charms could not be expected to outlive her complexion. And yet they liked her well. "Such a dear girl! Such character! Of course there are little defects, you know,—asperities we *might* call them." Take them by and large, however, such women as had decided to make the summer camp with the guns and squadrons were glad that Ethel Grahame was to join them, and the children were radiant.

Nathan's battery was with the command, but Nathan was not. The doctors had declared a summer at the sea-shore indispensable in the case of Mrs. Nathan, and the captain applied for three months' leave. He and his guns had not been exposed to any extent during the brief and bloody campaign that followed the outbreak of the Sioux, but Melville and "Cat" both seemed to think the battery could spare him. It left Torrance in command, a far better soldier despite his snobbish qualities. And though the

department commander made a wry face and the division general sniffed suggestively as he tossed the application to his chief of staff, the leave was granted. The summer opened gloriously. Squadron and battery drills went on each morning in splendid shape on the broad, level flats adjacent to the stream, and shooting, fishing, and picnic parties were of frequent occurrence in the hills. "Cat" entertained prominent Western statesmen and railway officials once or twice in June, and was not always happy in so doing, for more than once or twice they touched on dangerous ground, and if there was a topic on which "Cat" was touchy now it was that of Eric Langdon,—Langdon whom he had practically kicked out of Kansas only to see him become a hero in Nebraska.

In one sense the year had done its best for Langdon. He had become the idol of a large class of the population, but that, unless a man have political aspirations, is not of intrinsic or practical value, and furthermore is rarely of long duration. The populace needs new sensations. Shot through the leg in the dash to the rescue of the train, he had finally fainted from loss of blood while rescued and rescuers were embracing and shouting, and was found unconscious and well-nigh dead lying in a ravine full quarter of

a mile up the track, beyond the train, to which point he seemed to have followed fighting as though to assure himself the Indians contemplated no return attack. Frontier surgery is expert in gunshot wounds,—it having little else to deal with, and rude appliances kept body and soul together until the coming of experts with the troop-train from Omaha. Later, while the soldiery went on to round up the renegade Indians, Langdon was taken back to Brentwood, and nursed and coddled for long weeks. The regulars came in time for a stiff winter fight with the Sioux, but the ranch and railway people would hear of only one hero,—Eric Langdon. The new manager of the “Big Horn” called to see him and thank him in the name of the road. The road was full of a scheme to have him legislated back into the army, and a bill to that effect was actually introduced. Langdon said it was time wasted, but Nebraska Senators and Representatives were confident. It was at least a good thing to push along, as it would keep him from turning up as a possible congressional candidate himself. Sitting about the camp-fires in long winter evenings and reading the local papers, there was no end of chaff and fun among the regulars over that possibility. The train and station hands all along the “Big Horn” and

"Seattle," both, seemed to have forgotten their grievance of the year gone by, and would shout for Langdon at the faintest mention of his name. Two papers, "disgruntled," to use their own English, with their Representative, and to bother him, probably, as much as to "boom" Langdon, openly advocated placing Eric in nomination, whereat Rodney May and Woodrow chuckled with joy as Channing drawled out an inquiry of Nathan, "How would it do to have Langdon on the House Military Committee, for instance?" whereat Nathan scowled, but said naught that was audible.

There was a man, not in the army, who took the possibility more seriously, and that was Langdon's friend and benefactor, Cresswell, who, as had been said, had aspirations of his own. There is little doubt that had an election been possible that winter and the ex-officer a candidate, Langdon would have stood quite a chance. But by the time he was hobbling about on crutches in March the furore had subsided. Cresswell, a Southerner, still raged in his heart over the assault of which he had been the victim. It was not the physical suffering but the indignity that rankled, and he had not ceased his efforts through detectives to ferret out the guilty parties, but with little luck. Certain men

once prominent among the railway hands had left the State, but no one knew just why or whither. Langdon, on the contrary, had apparently lived down his wrath. "Fighting mad," as the conductor declared to Lieutenant Hunt, he certainly was until the peril that menaced the settlers and involved the train-load of helpless people dwarfed all personal consideration and turned his powers to their account. His story of the abduction was very brief and straight. Returning from the armory, he had let himself in at the front door of the office, closed it after him, and almost instantly felt himself grappled by powerful arms. Gruff voices warned him that a sound meant death when sound was impossible, for a huge, coarse hand was over his mouth, to be replaced in an instant by a chloroformed sponge and silken handkerchief. When consciousness returned he was in a wagon, blindfolded, bound and gagged, then was hoisted into an empty freight-car and trundled miles away through the night. His gag was removed as soon as the train went on, and he was given water, was assured that no harm was intended, "the boys" thought he'd better take a little trip up the country while business was dull in Brentwood, and they made him comfortable with blankets and pillows despite

the jolting of the clumsy car. At dawn he was taken from the train and driven miles across country in another wagon to a ranch, where people treated him with every care and kindness, but he was kept under lock and key until the night of the 30th, when there were sounds of weeping and dismay in an adjoining room, and he learned that there was a terrible raid by the Sioux "up the road." And then, fast as horses could bring them, came three railwaymen—not his abductors, for two of these were men he had known in the Brentwood yards and the voices were different. They told him of the dreadful deeds at Rosebud and the plight of the train, told him the troops were coming, that the strike was done, that all matters connected with it and damages of every kind were to be settled later. The question was would he resume duty at once with his company and head them to the rescue, leaving everything else to be settled later, if they would take him to the railway? He accepted instantly,—there was nothing else to do, —and the whole country knew the rest.

Since then the strike seemed to be a dropped matter. The men would not renew nor the officials reopen it, both sides being content to ignore it; the officials claiming that the hands had sufficiently punished themselves, and the hands pro-

fessing to believe that the road was preparing to accord them the terms demanded. To the wrath of Cresswell, and doubtless of other lawyers averse to all settlements out of court, no proceedings were instituted. The road dealt liberally with the families of employés who had suffered by the Sioux outbreak, and had sent Langdon to the best hospital in the State to be most skilfully and tenderly cared for. There he pursued his studies in the days of his convalescence, and by March was once again at Brentwood, occupying his old room over Cresswell's office, and supervising from a seat twice a week the drill of the Rifles, now at last in full command, for the governor signed that commission before ever the Rifles got back from the scene of their glory. Eric was Captain Langdon now and no mistake.

Mr. Burleigh stopped to see him the week he hobbled out on crutches, and said that the road had decided to send Betts elsewhere and to tender Langdon his old place. Langdon said he had no objections to their sending Betts to Halifax if they wished, but declined the position.

"You still resent their firing you on account of that safe business, I suppose," said Burleigh, in his attractive Western way.

"I resent their treatment of me at that time on every account," was the answer. "You well know that others than I had the combination, yet they were retained and one of them promoted."

Burleigh winced. Of course he knew it, but Betts was close to the management by marriage and his son a pet of the connecting link. It was their story and that of the station-master at Gunnison that hardened the hearts of the management against Langdon. Now he would not return to their employ. He stuck manfully to his studies in Cresswell's office, was able to pitch his crutch down-cellar in April and to drill his men in the public square under the gleam of the electric lights during the bright evenings in May, was at the depot to see Melville and the family the lovely June morning when they went through *en route* to the Hills, and a week later was surprised by a letter from the major begging that he should come up for a visit, a week's rest, fishing and camping.

There were several reasons why Langdon disliked to go. First, there was "Cat," the cavalry colonel who had brought him to trial at Pawnee. "Cat" would be glad to see him, wrote Melville, but would Langdon be glad to see "Cat"? No! Langdon knew he would not.

Melville didn't tell the particulars of his conference with "Cat," without whose full knowledge and consent, of course, he would not ask Langdon to be his guest, and "Cat" did not tell Melville the real reasons of his assent. But the way in which his civilian guests spoke of Langdon had set the colonel to thinking. It had not previously occurred to him that, just as certificates of long and faithful service in the army are of little aid in the rush for civil employment, so is army condemnation of little harm when a man displays the traits the people want. Mr. Burleigh lacked *finesse* and tact. He was coarse but far-sighted, and he told "Cat" that the Road would have given Langdon a good salary to buy him back, but he wouldn't be bought. "That fellow will be in Congress first thing they know, and—he won't be led by the nose." "Cat" still had an eye on that longed-for star, and, suppose now that Langdon should get there and be assigned to the Military Committee, just how much help could "Cat" look for at his hands? "Tell Melville to invite him by all means," said Mrs. Cat. But "Cat" demurred. Why had Langdon left Sheridan so mysteriously? Why had the "Big Horn" discharged him if they had not good reason to connect him with the robbery of the safe? Melville, with his

grave, courteous smile, promptly disposed of the first. It was to spare Nelson a possible breach with the post-commander. Sharpe felt that he ought not to allow Langdon to remain at the post one day after he was able to move, first, because of the bad blood between him and Armistead; second, because of his anomalous position as a dismissed officer. But Sharpe knew Nelson was impetuous of speech and intolerant of interference. He liked him well and thought for him, and so chose a time when Nelson had to be at stables to send his adjutant to Langdon to break to him, diplomatically as possible, his desire, and Langdon left between two bugle-calls, hurt and heart-sick, but convinced that the step was due to Nelson if not to Sharpe. When fairly away from Chicago, and beyond reach of Nelson's reproaches or expostulations, Langdon had written and given good reason for his action on that count at least. The Armistead affair was something that would have to be left for time to settle. It might crop out any moment in the future.

On the other matter, the safe robbery, "Cat" owned to himself with shame that he had trumped it up as an objection even when he disbelieved its truth, for Melville's clear eyes had fathomed his soul when the major calmly

asked, "You surely do not believe Langdon a party to that, do you?"

"Oh,—no—no, certainly I don't! Oh, well, ask him by all means, if you like. I—I—I—merely suggest these as matters—others might desire explained. Then—there's Torrance. Now, how do you expect them to meet?"

"They are not apt to meet at all. Mr. Torrance, you know, has not been welcome at my quarters since that occurrence," was Melville's quiet reply, and much to Torrance's chagrin, such was the case. He had been living with the bachelors' mess during the campaign and here in camp, Mrs. Torrance having taken that opportunity to go East, visit her kindred, and replenish her wardrobe. He had partially reestablished himself in the batteries by soldierly conduct in the campaign and during the mob days, but he knew Melville's household had heard all about the language which led to Langdon's assault, and how could that be condoned? He was a sorely unhappy man that summer, and May and Woodrow said it served him right.

There was another reason why Langdon didn't care to leave Brentwood just then. Cresswell was a relentless hater. He was still trying to ferret out his assailant or assailants, and he had never ceased his shadowing of Betts and

his aspiring son. Cresswell worked in secrecy, binding Langdon to silence. He had been most helpful and liberal to Langdon in every way, even when he dreaded his looming up as a competitor for Congress. He was fairly well to do, and could easily have been richer but for the Southern temperament, which made him open-handed as he was open-hearted. He insisted on advancing Langdon money to meet the claims that would not wait, and begged him to accept more that he might dress and live like a gentleman. He meant Langdon to grow into the increasing business and care for it and preserve it, leaving him, Cresswell, free to pursue his political path. But Langdon was obdurate. The Rifles had presented their new captain with his entire outfit of uniform and equipment on his return to duty. Boniface "gave him a rate" at his hospitable board that even Langdon half resented as not being equitable, but Boniface swore Langdon was worth more than his board,—"He drew custom." Langdon's law studies were going on uninterruptedly and well. He could reasonably expect to stand all legitimate quizzing and be called to the bar within another twelvemonth provided there were no distractions. He did not allow the will-o'-the-wisp of possible reinstatement to draw him from incres-

sant study. What was the use of going back to the army anyway? He could never settle those outstanding debts and keep up the proper appearance on the pay of a lieutenant. The path to competence and freedom lay in civil life. He could far better repay the nation for his West Point education by assiduous drill and instruction of the State soldiery than by pottering about another ten years as a file-closer. To return to the regiment was only to place himself once more where such narrow minds as "Cat" and such vicious souls as Nathan could slight or sting him. To remain in civil life would soon place him, should he see fit to enter politics, where, if he were mean enough, he could slight or sting them. "You are better off to-day than you have been since the day of your graduation," said Cresswell. "You are independent." He would have said even more but that he feared to wound. What he thought was: "Thank God for two things, my lad!—you've neither wife nor child to hamper you. The married man is never free."

"Langdon," said Cresswell, coming into the office one bright June morning, "I want you to knock off for a few days and take a run with me to Lincoln and Omaha. There are people you ought to meet. Why, surely you can leave

the Rifles that long, can't you?" he continued, noting instantly the demur in Langdon's face.

"Yes. In fact, I have begun to think of leaving them a whole week. Read that." And Langdon placed Melville's letter in the lawyer's hands and then rose and walked to the window.

"H'm," mused Cresswell, a moment later, as thoughtfully he replaced the missive in its envelope. "I might have seen this coming the day that girl's face peered from the car window last week." Then aloud said he, "Eric, you keep away from that camp unless you're courting further trouble," and abruptly left the room.

Yet Eric went, and, possibly, courted.

CHAPTER XVI

A PROBLEM that had worried "Cat" was just how he should treat Langdon when he came to camp. It was the duty of officers visiting within its limits to call upon the commander unless they happened to be his senior in rank. But "Cat" went further. He considered it to be the duty of even civilians to show their appreciation of his station; a case of mistaken judgment, since the average American civilian shows respect to nobody except a woman—and not too much to her. "Cat" considered that Langdon would call, accompanied by Melville, when he could invite them both to dine. But Langdon didn't come and didn't call. He had been bidden to spend a week with Melville and go with him and a party on a four days' picnic in the Hills. Langdon's answer reached Melville the day before the start. He would join them on the picnic, but, as yet, thought best not to visit camp. Melville's orderly met him with a spare horse at War Bonnet Station, and a day's ride northward by way of Buffalo Gap brought him at sunset into the midst of a joyous gathering. Woodrow and

Rodney May had even galloped out ten miles to meet and guide him in.

"It's just our own crowd, Eric!" said Rodney, joyously. "We'd be like old times if we only had 'Hurricane' here," and Langdon, who somehow had half expected to find Santley and possibly Channing of the party, felt instant sense of relief, yet hardly liked to own it even to himself. Santley he cared little about, but Channing had stood his friend and served him well. Why should he not have welcomed Channing's presence? Why should he secretly rejoice that Channing was not here?

With the old accustomed salute and with joy in their honest eyes, a brace of batterymen sprang to aid him as the little party dismounted in a lovely glade among the crested hills. White tents gleamed among the pines in the setting sun. Dogs and children, with loud acclaim, came tumbling to meet him. Melville, glad and genial, linked his arm in that of his guest and led him to the camp-fire. Two sturdy young Melvilles climbed and twined about his legs and beat him lustily upon the back as the ladies arose to greet him, Mrs. Melville with frankly extended hand, while Ethel Grahame, looking the picture of health and serenity in a Jersey waist and Tam o' Shanter, clamped a huge earthen

bowl in one rounded arm and presented a spoonful of syrup, her soft cheek dimpling, her white teeth gleaming between the ripe red lips. Langdon bowed over Mrs. Melville's hand and bent both knees in abortive attempt to sip the contents of the spoon, a difficult feat without the aid of the youngsters, and one that only resulted, on their part, in a climbing race for his back and, on his, to still further prostration. It was just as well for Channing's peace of mind that he had not been included in the family plan. It might have been better had not that plan likewise omitted Santley, who had found means to get away from battery duties and to take the thirty-mile ride into the heart of the Hills on the trail of his hopes, and, sitting in saddle at the edge of the glade, to look on at this pretty picture, and then turn and curse the folly that had led him thither. Others might welcome Langdon: he could and would not. Neither could he spend the night, as he had planned, in Melville's camp. In bitterness of spirit he rode back a dozen miles to a miner's cabin, and Torrance was his confidant when at noon next day he returned to duty and reported what he had seen.

Five evenings later the whole command, six troops of horse and two field batteries, were

grooming at the picket-ropes along under the edge of the *mesa*, and Torrance in natty undress uniform, riding-whip in hand, was sauntering up and down watching the work of his men, when he became aware of eager glances and mutterings. The tap tap of currycomb and brush went on as steadily, but heads kept bobbing up and gazing over the brown backs of his strong gun teams; and, glancing about to see what it meant, Torrance became aware of a sight that sent him presently to the opposite side of his line. Strolling down the slope, talking volubly, came the colonel, his dogs tumbling about him as usual, his orderly following primly at his allotted distance. Melville, calm, courteous, and dignified as ever, listening with all outward appearance of serene interest on one side, and on the other, lithe, spare, and erect, looking marvellously unlike the sad, jaded, hopeless man who left their midst the second year before, clad now in trim camping garb strode Eric Langdon. When "D" Battery broke ranks half an hour later three rousing cheers rang out on the evening air, and Torrance sent for his first sergeant.

"What made the men cheer?" he asked. And the sergeant was imperturbable.

"I couldn't say, sir. They just broke out

when we broke ranks. Reckon they felt good, sir."

"Look here, Sergeant Flynn," said Torrance, "men don't cheer in unison without somebody to give the word. Who gave it and what for?"

"Sergeant Rancey gave it, sir. He didn't say what for." "He didn't have to," was what the veteran was within an inch of saying.

"This thing's got to stop," said Torrance, sternly. "You know as well as I it was because of—of Mr. Langdon's being here, and such demonstrations are disrespectful to the colonel."

"The colonel didn't hear it, sir. He'd gone home."

"He'll hear *of* it, and hold me responsible!" said Torrance, angrily. "Not only that, but I observed men saluting when they spoke to Mr. Langdon. That's all wrong."

The battery sergeant ground his heels together—and his teeth, but held his peace.

"You know a dismissed officer's entitled to no such honors," said Torrance. "Just order it stopped. You may go." And Flynn turned away, thinking things he could not say.

Langdon spent that night at Melville's tent, and was to leave for the railway after breakfast in the morning. Before breakfast he and Ethel

Grahame were strolling slowly up the shaded pathway in the north ravine. The brook came tumbling noisily down its rocky bed to their right, and half a mile out they met a little squad of batterymen with the familiar "D" upon their hats. They were carrying tempting little strings of trout. Two of them glanced at Langdon, reddened, half raised their right hands, dropped them and gazed awkwardly away. They were his own old men. Then they met a third, who looked squarely at him and raised his hat as courteously as a Virginian and stood aside to let them by. A few rods farther on two others, fishing from the bank, turned and gazed, then glanced quickly at each other and exchanged grins. These last were strangers,—men who had come into the battery after he had left it, a rather ill-favored pair. There was no reason why they should salute. There were reasons why they should not. But, on the other hand, a courteous and respectful demeanor should have been observed if for no other reason than the presence of a woman, a member of the major's household. But it pleased these two young cubs, only recently from the streets of some Eastern city, to titter audibly and follow the pair with impertinent glances. Langdon could not but see it, and his soul rose up in wrath. Miss Grahame, too,

had not failed to notice a thing so utterly unlike the pleased, smiling manner of the veteran soldiers whenever the garrison ladies happened to pass their way. Eager to dissemble, as though she had not seen, Ethel plunged instantly into enthusiastic comment on the view before them. It was indeed a lovely scene, but Langdon's soul was hot within him. The indignity was as much to her as to him. He half turned as though intending to step back and accost them. She read his purpose, and with quick movement placed herself before him.

"Oh, just look at that vine!" she cried, pointing to a climbing plant among the rocks across the tumbling brook. Then all-smiling confidence beamed upon the fishing twain. "Oh, could you reach me a spray of that? I'll thank you so much."

No answer. With broad blue flannel backs ostentatiously turned towards the speaker, the two young fellows hung their heads, slyly glanced at each other and giggled again. It was more than Langdon could stand. Springing past her, standing stunned and aggrieved at such boorishness,—the first and only evidence of ill will she ever saw among the soldiery,—he was upon them in an instant.

"Out of the way, you hulking brutes!" he

ordered, low and stern, as he laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the nearest.

"I don't have to," sneered the fellow. "*You* ain't givin' orders here," and went spinning backward at the instant, hurled by all the force Langdon's arm could muster. It wasn't too much. His old training stood him in good stead, but practice had been stopped by the wound of the previous winter, and in another moment he realized that he had two ruffians to deal with and was alone, unarmed. Ethel Grahame's shriek of terror rang through the ravine as the two sprang at their helpless victim and bore him down among the rocks. The next instant a tall young soldier bounded past her and hurled himself upon the topmost assailant. It was the lad they rescued from the street blackguards that night at Brentwood. Then from behind a screening ledge of rock stepped another figure. "This is no place for you, Miss Grahame," said a voice she recognized at once. "Let me escort you home." And Lieutenant Santley laid a hand upon her wrist. For answer she shook him off, sprang forward, dipped her handkerchief in the rushing waters, and, quickly turning, placed it upon Langdon's temple, as dizzy and somewhat dazed and breathless he rose from the ground, the blood trickling from

a little gash in his forehead. One of the attacking party, furiously struggling, was being pinned to earth by Langdon's rescuer. The other, wet and bedraggled, stood shivering in the grasp of big Sergeant Rancey, who shook him furiously and demanded was he drunk or crazy.

"I'm obeyin' orders," was the surly, sullen, abject answer.

"Whose order? you blackguard!" howled Rancey, with another shake. "Whose orders, I say! Answer, or I'll shake the life out of ye!"

The woebegone "rookie" dropped his eyes and writhed miserably in the grasp at his collar. Then, in mingled appeal and reproach, the fellow looked furtively about until his eyes rested upon his lieutenant.

"It's a damned lie!" cried Santley.

CHAPTER XVII

THE firm of Cresswell & Langdon, Attorneys and Counsellors-at-Law, to use the diction of the dramatic papers, "opened to good business" in Brentwood, and its fame spread beyond the Redwater Valley. One thing about it was objectionable to the junior member from the start. The "Seattle" had by this time "subsidized" Cresswell, and limited the sphere of usefulness of the concern. Langdon had no reason to love the management of either road, but that of the "Seattle" was especially obnoxious. Men with just claims against that company could not look to him for legal aid, and he would have been less than human had he not cared in such cases to appear rather for the plaintiff than the defendant. The Road had its regular legal staff, of course, and kept it busy day and night. A railroad lawyer may be paid a salary no superintendent can aspire to, but he earns it, and must see to it that local talent along the line is not too often arrayed against him. "You're too damned Quixotic, Langdon," said even his big-hearted, big-framed, big-voiced Kentucky friend.

"You're too much given to kicking against the pricks. That's no way to get ahead in life!"

Langdon was poring over some papers at the moment, and turned in his revolving chair and looked up with a quizzical smile. Gray hairs were sprouting at his temples, two or three appeared in the thick growth of his moustache. Lines and crows' feet were digging underneath his fine, clear eyes, but he was looking the world in the face now. He had his start and sought no favors. "You are thinking of which case now?" he asked, and there were two of Langdon's eccentricities the senior never ceased to twit him about. One was the celebrated trial of the United States *vs.* Santley, when that distinguished officer was brought to book by an irate colonel of cavalry because of sensational stories growing out of the ravine episode. The other was the arraignment of a former assistant in the M. V. office at Brentwood, as accessory in the safe robbery that had resulted in Langdon's discharge. Santley's trial came off long months after the occurrence that led to it, for that story at the time was known to but one woman and half a dozen men, but with a host of vivid embellishments was spread broadcast during the winter, when one of the "toughs," whose life had been made almost a burden to

him when the story gradually made its way about the battery, concluded that desertion was better than persecution, and turned up in Chicago with a pitiful tale of wrong and oppression, abuse and tyranny, in the regular army. There was something at bottom as the fellow told it, for investigation developed that they had assaulted Langdon, that they had provoked his wrath, and that they had insisted they were obeying Santley's orders. They swore to it, in fact, and it might have gone hard with Santley, all things considered, had not Langdon himself journeyed to Pawnee, testified to the exact manner and language of the pair, and then so aided Santley in his defence that the slanderers were confounded in open court. It was established that Santley had merely cautioned the members of the battery that they were to pay no more attention to Mr. Langdon than to any other civilian, and his accusers broke down when cross-examined as to the time, place, and circumstances under which he had given them further and specific instructions. It spoiled a newspaper sensation and saved a commission. But Santley was sore hurt. Everybody knew he was deeply smitten with Ethel Grahame and had not prospered in his suit. Many knew that there was only one man who could set him right before the court, and

that was the last man he could ask to do so, and few had any inkling of the plan of the defence when, as a guest of Major Melville, Mr. Langdon appeared at Pawnee little more than two years after his expulsion therefrom, looking very well groomed and fed for a man "picked up out of the Chicago streets," as the Nathans had said, two winters before,—very calm and dignified in manner, very glad to see Rodney May and Woodrow, very cordial to Channing and his cavalry chums, very courteous to Santley, and most civil to Colonel and Mrs. Cat. Nathan and Torrance he never seemed to see, and during his forty-eight hours' sojourn at the post both those warriors were much occupied with home duties. All Pawnee, however, was aware of the fact that Miss Grahame and Lawyer Langdon had gone out riding together the afternoon of the second day, and Miss Grahame's eyes and color were something beautiful to see as she slid from saddle, with just a touch of her slender, shapely hand on Langdon's shoulder as he assisted her to dismount. Everybody else at Melville's was out of sight at the moment, but there were spectators galore up and down the row and on other piazzas, despite the chill air of the close of a winter's day. It was perhaps the consciousness of this display of garri-

son interest that prompted that very independent young woman to turn at the fence and accost him once more, thereby causing him to leave the horses to the care of Bugler Kerry and to follow her to the steps and stand there, looking up into her glowing face, with the slant of the setting sunbeams illumining his own clear-cut, soldierly visage. "Looks to me," said Captain Cannon to his better half, "much as though Sheeny's malevolence meant Langdon's ultimate bliss." And as Cannon was one of the very many of Ethel Grahame's appreciators, it was proper that Mrs. Cannon should promptly point out to him the detrimental side, which she did.

"What good will it do him? She hasn't a penny and he has nothing but his debts."

"Some women, my dear," said the big gunner, oracularly, "are treasures without a penny. As for Langdon's debts," he added, with a sigh, "I wish I saw as clear a sky ahead,"—a speech which ruined the serenity of Mrs. Cannon's usually sunny temper as much as a week, and Cannon's coffee was cold and streaky on the morrow. That visit was quite the episode of midwinter at Pawnee in ways more than one. Nathan, Torrance, and Santley, who had been quite a close community, had a flare-up of some kind, and parted company. This was Quixotism

number one,—this trip to Pawnee and to the defence of Lieutenant Santley, according to Cresswell's views. He was for a duel *à outrance* when first the story of Santley's malignant persecution of his new partner reached his ears. It was nearly a vain effort for Langdon to tell him the story was grossly exaggerated. It had all the elements of probability, said Cresswell, and he hardly knew what to make of Langdon's indifference. Then, several months later still, as the result of Cresswell's persistent proddings, there were indications that the M. V. people were actually bestirring themselves over that old safe business, and one April morning Brentwood was excited by the story that young Frewen, an English lad whose father had died in the service of the road six years before, was behind the bars awaiting trial on charge of being the safe robber. This was certainly not what Cresswell had been working for. He believed that Betts junior was the man, as he had the safe combination and access to the office at all hours. Frewen had neither. Betts senior was "up the road" the night preceding the discovery of the loss, and Langdon had been in the office alone for an hour after the money was placed in the drawer and before he took the evening train to Gunnison. The officers of the

Road at the time seemed certain that everything pointed to Langdon, but it transpired later that every cent he had spent could otherwise be accounted for. Young Betts was something of a swell in his way, a gallant among the Brentwood girls, but he had spent no money beyond that which he received as salary and that "given him by his father," which statement the senior confirmed. For a time it looked as though the thief had been scared into hiding his plunder and was waiting until the hue-and-cry was over before unearthing and using it. Frewen was a shy, quiet little fellow who lived with his widowed mother and gave her most of his scanty salary, but he was in love with a pretty Brentwood girl who favored his suit at first, but tired of the prospect of a long engagement, and began tormenting him by going occasionally with Betts and others to evening entertainments. Frewen was jealous and unhappy awhile, and then came a change. He returned from a brief visit to Omaha, appeared for the first time in his life in stylish raiment and began to cut a dash in social circles; joined the Rifles, then in the heyday of their fame and fortune, and took pretty Aileen to parties where Betts was not even bidden, and in April came the crash. It would have lifted the last vestige of suspicion from Langdon's

name had Frewen been convicted. But he wasn't, for Langdon, his captain, turned to and proved him innocent. It was a simple matter. The contemplation of her boy's misery had been too much for even a grasping and parsimonious woman. Mrs. Frewen had money stored away that she had scraped and saved for years, but denied, fearing that the pension paid her by the road would be stopped if ever the management found she was fairly well to do. Langdon's almost laughing development of that case was a joy to the Brentwood yarn-spinners for long months later, but it put "the Road" in bad light—notably the house of Betts—and won him more enmity. Therefore did Cresswell call him contumacious and Quixotic. Both Betts's and both Roads were arrayed against him now, and Cresswell fretted. What was he to do with a partner who made enemies among the seats of the mighty and would not truckle to the mammon of unrighteousness? Langdon saw unerringly what was passing in the senior's mind, and that summer told him so. "You have been a good friend to me and I must not hamper your hopes and plans, colonel," said he. "If you should be nominated for Congress I'll take the stump for you. If not, they need active lawyers in the far Northwest where the Road is

pushing through the Idaho mines. I'll swing my shingle out there."

Two things happened to add force to the project. For the very reason that his opponents proved him a "corporation lawyer" the farmers and artisans joined forces against Cresswell and he failed to capture the convention, a man of far inferior mould becoming the nominee for Congress. It soured the Kentuckian more than a little, yet was exactly what Langdon had prophesied. No elder likes to see the power to say "I told you so" in the hands of a junior partner. Langdon discreetly said nothing except in answer to his senior's remarks. He was having an experience of his own.

The command of the regiment to which the Rifles were assigned as Company "C" had been vested in a veteran of the civil war who once knew something of old-time tactics, but could not master the new. In June the regiment was under canvas, and such instruction as the colonel could give it, for an entire week, and the whole organization could see that the Brentwood and Gunnison companies that had had the advantage of Langdon's coaching were head and shoulders above the rest. One day the colonel was ill, the lieutenant-colonel was suddenly confronted by a possibility he had never contem-

plated, that of having to drill the battalion. Camp was to be inspected next day by a "regular." There would surely be a review with the whole countryside out to see and scores of fellows from other regiments to criticise. It ended in Captain Langdon being asked to "act" as commanding officer, which he did with consummate ease, and gave them hours of such "coaching" as they'd never had, and more all the afternoon and following morning, to the end that the eight companies passed a surprisingly creditable inspection, and their review was the best given by any of the State forces that summer. The old colonel resigned at the close of camp, the lieutenant-colonel waived promotion, the officers signed a paper asking that Langdon be made colonel, and then some of them privately told the adjutant-general they did so because they "couldn't say no, exactly," and yet were opposed to the idea. They well might be, because they knew their incapacity and felt that Langdon would soon be after them with a sharp stick. The two Roads through their representatives had also something to say. Mr. Langdon was a brave officer and all that, a good man to have at hand in time of trouble, but one who would probably make more trouble than he could cure. Again the executive found that there was

an undercurrent among the political soldiers and the management of the Roads inimical to Langdon's advancement. Election was coming on. Campaign funds were needed. "Put away the sword. States can be saved without it," was something any statesman could say, from Richelieu down, but where was the statesman who could say States could be saved without money? The governor knew that personally and professionally Langdon was the man of all others for that promotion, but he gave it to the major, a gentleman who didn't know a cartridge from a cat-o'-nine-tails, and that autumn in an editorial, genuine in its regret, the *Banner* referred to the removal from their midst of the law firm of Cresswell & Langdon. It was understood that brilliant prospects awaited the gentlemen comprising it in the field of their new operations,—the rapidly developing region of the mines and forests of the far Northwest. It was understood that they had already secured their office in the heart of the great lumber district of the Columbias, and that except in memory Nebraska would know them no more. That winter Cresswell & Langdon were enrolled among the tax-payers of Spartanville. Another year and the Kentuckian was in his element, and the Legislature, while Langdon stuck to the desk and the courts

until once again importuned by men who knew of his deeds in Nebraska to take the head of a stalwart company of far Northwestern militiamen. "Good God! Langdon," said Cresswell, "haven't you wasted enough time in that thankless work? What good do you ever expect to get out of it?"

"Two goods, colonel," said Langdon, tranquilly. "One is that I am paying the nation for my education. Another, gaining for myself a hold among the men from whom the nation must find her soldiers next time she goes to battle. It's got to come, and when it does—I go out at the head of a regiment and not the tail of a battery. Mark you that."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE firm of Cresswell & Langdon, Attorneys and Counsellors-at-Law, had moved to the capital. The title of colonel, so long and so gracefully worn by the senior member, had given way to that of judge, and had perched, eagles and all, upon the shoulders of his martial junior. In a great commonwealth of the far Northwest men of brain, brawn, and energy were not long lacking abundant work, and as the years rolled on and Langdon gained confidence with constant practice in the courts, there came a time when he could have wished for greater opportunity for study. "Give up your tin soldiering," growled the judge. "Here you are, going on forty, and wasting three or four evenings a week fooling round with a lot of boys playing with swords and guns." And still Langdon smiled the same quiet, quizzical smile, passed his long, slim fingers back through the thinning crop of dark hair, all silvered now, as was the trooper moustache, and looked up at his portly senior and said, "I'm just beginning to enjoy it."

Regulars galore were stationed along the valley of the North American Amazon. Infantry at Vancouver, Spokane, and Cœur d'Alène, cav-

alry at Boisé and Walla Walla, gunners at the big forts along the coast, and the old regiment had come again to the Pacific, and Melville, with silver leaves instead of gold upon his "rectangles," was commanding at the stone fortress in the bay, and Nathan, rejoicing in the proximity of San Francisco, and May and Woodrow in their first lieutenancies, all had heard of Langdon's steady progress, and some had even seen him at the summer camps of the State soldiery and watched his hard, patient, skilful work with the crude but ambitious battalions. There was no question who should succeed to the colonelcy of the scattered regiment of guardsmen when one administration stepped down and out and a political pet of the departing governor was induced to resign. For four years he had been but the figure-head, while Langdon was pilot, captain, and engineer of the craft, ever coaching, drilling, and encouraging, and so, finding it useless to coax his partner out of his fad for military service, Cresswell turned to, as he had a dozen times before, to work for his advancement. He had stumped the State in the interests of the new governor and demanded as partial payment that the regiment's plea should be honored and Langdon promoted colonel. "Lots of work and no pay" was his summing up, as

he handed the commission to his favorite. "But I suppose you'd rather have that sheepskin than the woolsack. If there was a war on you'd be all right, but there isn't a scrap in sight, and it's time and money thrown away."

That was in April, '97, and, just one year later, came the call to arms and the muster into service of the "First Washoes," Eric Langdon lieutenant-colonel commanding.

"That fellow has the gift of prophecy," said the judge to the brigade commander, as together they stood at the Pacific wharf watching the grave, silent soldier as he supervised the orderly movement of his two battalions aboard ship. "Five years ago he said to me the war would come, and when it came he'd go in at the head of a regiment, not the tail of a battery. Here he is! Pity they only called for eight companies from our State. I'd like to see him full colonel."

The general smiled, his kind brown eyes softening as they continued their steady gaze at Langdon. "He deserves it all, judge. There hasn't been a better regimental commander in the whole corps, so far. There are men who were his prosecutors at Pawnee who would be glad to be in his shoes to-day."

"Where is that fellow Nathan, by the way?" asked the Kentuckian, impulsively.

The general's smile broadened a bit, his eyes twinkling. It was not his wont to speak ill of any man, yet who in the old regiment had not heard how "Sheeny" had striven for a staff position in the volunteers and totally failed. The editorial upbraidings of the administration because it had frequently to say yes to certain importunities had no idea how many thousand times the sorely bothered Secretary and adjutant-general had determinedly said no. In all probability they would only have been the more roundly abused had it been known. Nathan's "pull" with the "Seattle" was still there, but the President wouldn't listen to outside pleas for the promotion of regulars when the Department shook its head. Before he could succeed in any of his schemes Nathan had found himself ordered aboard ship with his battery, now serving afoot as one of four companies of "red-legged infantry," and away they went across the seas when the gold leaves of the majority were almost dangling before his eyes. Senior of his grade in the regiment, "Sheeny" was not even trusted with the command of a battalion, and when not actually prostrated by sea-sickness, his waking hours aboard ship twixt the Farallones and Honolulu were given over to the writing of urgent letters to friends and kindred and certain State

officials, calling on them to see to it that he was appointed to the colonelcy of one of the volunteer regiments being raised on the Pacific coast, for that could be done by a governor whether the War Department liked it or not, and might insure his being ordered back to San Francisco. The list of casualties among the officers of the regulars at San Juan Hill came just in time to put him out of all conceit with the idea of heading a company in an attack on the walls of Manila, still bristling with Spanish Mausers. Everything towards securing that appointment man could do in the few days left him before putting to sea Nathan had conscientiously done, leaving to his lieutenant the duty of preparing the battery for the voyage and the possible campaign. There was no cable to Honolulu, but there the flotilla had to stop four days for coal, and while there the O. & O. liner came after them with letters. "All well," wrote Mrs. Nathan's kinsfolk. "We have the governor's positive promise that you shall be made lieutenant-colonel at least, but we've had to buy off Bent, to whom it was promised, and to 'touch' a dozen other fellows. We cannot buy off the colonel. Arrange to wait ten days at Honolulu and the commission and orders will reach you." Nathan knew that the corps commander would be along within

that time, and that he would never approve his detachment to the command of volunteers. Moreover, every officer and man might be needed for the fight at Manila. To appeal to the battalion commander or to Melville, the general at the head of the expedition, would be equally useless. The game was to appear to be full bent on going with the command, but to balk it, somehow, at Honolulu. Permission could not well be refused him to go ashore, since so many officers and men were accorded that privilege. He secured charming quarters at the Royal Hawaiian and gave a toothsome dinner to a jovial party of his cronies, but the general, who was bidden, pleaded a previous engagement. The chief surgeon, another officer included in the list, marvelled for a moment at the unexpected courtesy, for he had very gruffly scouted Nathan's tentatives at 'Frisco when consulted as to the possibility of his getting a few weeks' sick-leave, or at least permission to delay, but the general showed his grim Scotch medicine-man a paragraph from a letter just received from the commander of the forces, by this time himself on the way from the Golden Gate. "It is understood that Captain Nathan is moving heaven and earth to get a commission in the volunteers who are to remain in camp here. He

may endeavor to be left behind on account of supposititious illness at Honolulu, in which case let your chief surgeon examine him. Sawney will stand no nonsense. Captain Nathan should not be permitted to shirk this expedition."

"He won't be," said the brigade commander, placidly, as he refolded the letter. And when it was found that Nathan was ordering an undue quantity of his luggage ashore, the battalion commander as placidly interposed. A tall, spare, almost saturnine veteran was the major, a soldier who had shouldered a musket with the very first and best of the State regiments that in '61 were rushed to the defence of Washington, a man with the genius of a general bottled down for a generation under the strap of a lieutenant, a soldier in whose hands "Sheeny" had about as much chance to shirk as he had to fly. The captain's shore-leave expired at dawn, and the flotilla was to sail at noon the following day. The captain's dinner went off in style, with much native music and no little champagne, and then in the wee sma' hours, after the guests had been whisked away in Honolulu "flies," the night clerk was summoned to the captain's room and bidden to fetch a doctor in haste, and a local practitioner came and found the officer in well-simulated agony and prescribed according to his

lights—and the captain's liver. He was amazed to receive a visit at breakfast-time from a Scotch surgeon-in-chief and a stocky little adjutant, who demanded sight of and speech with his patient, to the end that Nathan was bidden to arise, quit his bed, and go to the dock and thence to the ship. There was nothing the matter with him, said Major Sawney, a dose of salts would not set to rights, and Nathan's pains and preparations went for naught. He and his luggage were on the ship and off for Manila before the setting of the sun, but there, there did triumph await him in the shape of despatches from the States to the effect that he was commissioned lieutenant-colonel Second Columbias, and on acceptance, which he cabled at once, directed to report for duty with his regiment at San Francisco. The battalion went into the muddy trenches and the assault of Manila minus one able-bodied captain, who minded not the dollars it cost him to flit at once to Hong-Kong and thence by O. & O. liner back to the States. Not until among the last regiments to reach the islands did the Second Columbias appear along in December, and were pushed forward to the eastward suburb in support of the First Brigade, for insurgent cannon frowned from new-made redoubts and bore full upon the unprotected lines

along the Concordia, and thirty thousand swarthy, scowling soldiery surrounded and hemmed in the slender forces of invaders. All too late the Government found its little army of occupation far outnumbered and sternly menaced at Manila, and so rushed the regiments of regulars to the seaboard *au secours*, but long before the foremost could reach the shores of Luzon the blow had fallen, Aguinaldo had dashed his devoted followers upon the sturdy ranks in blue, and, regular and volunteer, the two little divisions about the beleaguered city were grappling with overwhelming force of Tagalogs.

And in the dark hour just before the dawn of that radiant and most eventful Sunday of the first week in February a strange thing happened. Away out along the crooked estuary of the Concordia, fronting on the left the dim, graystone walls of Santa Ana, and on the right interminable thicket, or well-nigh impassable swamp, the thin line of the First Division stretched from the Pasig at Pandacan Point far across to old Fort San Antonio on the bay,—officers and men alike waiting and praying for the word that was to loose them from the leash and let them go in furious rush upon the swarms of dusky foemen, who since three o'clock had been pouring in hot

fire from the shelter of their stone and earthen walls, and driving a storm of steel-clad lead upon the unprotected lads in blue. In grim subordination they had obeyed the orders that forbade their turning a spade of earth for counter-intrenchments, lest the natives, who for weeks had been building redoubts and planting cannons, should accuse the American of hostile intent. Loyal to their duty and observant of instructions that were hard to appreciate or understand, they had borne the brunt of the storm and seen some of their best and bravest swept away, but ground their teeth and gripped their Springfields harder, and took heart in the promise passed along the crouching line. "Our time will come, lads. Wait till broad daylight."

And now it was nearly five, and from the shelter of old earthen walls and mounds across the crooked Tripa the Tagal rifles were pouring in heavy fire on the flank and even the rear of the Americans lying south of the bridge. Every company of the great Evergreens was hotly engaged, and the brigade commander galloped to his reserve, halted among the streets of Paco. The mountain guns of the regulars were bellowing from the left of the block-house at the Krupps under the convent walls at Santa Ana. The long rifled breechloaders at Battery Knoll,

in rear of the right of the brigade, were sending shrapnel spattering into the bamboo thickets where the insurgent Mausers were spitefully crackling. Everywhere, as the dawn began to streak the skies above the village roofs, the roar of battle stunned the ear, and men hugged the ground as the deadly hail whistled overhead, and the little native horses, the mounts of the staff and field officers, squealed and bit and kicked in nervous wrath at the unseen, hissing, vicious demons of the air that buzzed about their ears or bit or scored their way along haunch and flank. Behind the stone wall, well within the limits of the eastward suburb, a lieutenant-colonel, in natty khaki uniform, had dismounted and was expostulating with his pony as the general galloped up.

"Put two companies in at once, on the right of the village facing that shack yonder! What's the matter with your horse, colonel?"

"Seems to be scared, sir. I thought he was hit—he behaved so bad," was the faltering answer.

"Then mount my orderly's. He'll stand anything. You take the colonel's, Hanford," said the chief to the tall lad who rode at his heels. "Lively, now, Nathan, there's not a second to lose! I'll relieve you here with the Washoes."

Under the dim lights of the street lamps, in the first gray mists of the morning, swinging up the main street in solid sets of fours, came a column of sturdy foot, striding as though burning with eagerness to get into the fight.

"Move your battalion into the side streets, right and left, Colonel Langdon," were the quick orders. "Keep them under shelter till I send for you. Now then, what's the matter with those Columbias?" he snapped, eager, impatient, intolerant of delay. "Here, bring your men through this lane, captain!" and away went the general's protesting pony and a brace of aides-de-camp, two companies of the Columbias, arms at a trail, scurrying after them afoot. Something delayed their field officer,—stirrups too long or too short. He was fiercely tugging at the leather on one side, his orderly bugler on the other. The little steed with which he had experienced such unaccountable difficulties displayed astonishing agility and zeal the moment the boy orderly straddled him, and darted away on the trail of the Columbias without so much as a protest. Drawn up within a little walled enclosure the caissons of the mountain guns stood sheltered from the Mausers whistling overhead from the blazing front. A squad of eager drivers, crouching by the gate, snickered

at the sight across the narrow way. "Sheeny's damned particular just where that hole's got to be punched," jeered a grizzled driver who had served in the old battery.

"Damned particular not to get one in his own hide, you mean!" laughed a mate. "Where's his colonel, anyhow?"

"Over at the right. Sheeny only had four companies. Here comes Washoe now." And then at the right front, beyond the village walls, a mad cheer went up to the skies, followed by a crashing volley. The Columbias had burst from the thickets at the edge of the suburbs and made their dash to the banks of the stream. Oh, that they could only cross it and drive the lurking foe with dripping bayonet! But still the stern mandate came from the distant rear, "Defend but don't advance beyond the line." Another instant and another cheer, ringing, hearty, spontaneous, went up among the teams and caissons of the battery, and the commander of the advancing regiment, halting in surprise at the sound of his own name, turned, saw the smiling, swarthy faces under the dim light of the street lamp, and half shaking a gauntleted fist, raised his campaign hat, and smiled greeting and appreciation. A moment later, his battalions carefully disposed, one on each side of the highway,

under cover of the walls, the colonel turned his active little mount across the way, and "old hands" of Pawnee days and the lieutenant they knew and honored in the batteries faced each other under fire, and Langdon was grasping the brawny fists of men who were humble cannoners the day they lifted up their voices in parting shout for the "best officer in Battery 'D.'" Again came the crash of volleys from the right front, and the shriek of a Krupp shell overhead, and a staff officer came spurring back from the block-house up the highway. "Colonel Nathan here?" he shouted, loud, insistent, imperative. A dozen voices answered, a dozen hands indicated the way. "The general wants you at the footbridge at once, sir," were the added words, and there was but scant respect in the tone; there was utter scorn of the etiquette of the service that demands of a mounted officer that he alight before addressing a senior afoot. Drowning men grasp at straws. Anything to temporize, Nathan seized eagerly the pretext. "If you intend that remark for me, sir," he said, "you will dismount and convey it with proper respect," but the aide had not even stopped to listen. He was spurring swiftly down the line of the Washoes crouching at the roadside, and there was marked difference in the tone with

which he asked for Colonel Langdon. "Here!" rang the prompt answer, as that officer instantly dropped his chat with the gunners and reined out into the road. The red was in the sky, the pallid light of dawn already strong enough to outline forms and figures close at hand, but all men's faces were drawn and wan. There had been long nights of vigil, and later the strain of long hours under fire. Two men of the nearest company, close to the high-road, turned over on their backs, one with strange anguish in his boyish face, the other, after a moment's struggle, with staring, sightless eyes. Strong arms raised and bore them to the refuge of an adjoining wall. Low-flying Mausers had found their billet in the recumbent line. "First blood for the Filipino," muttered a grizzled major, with an upward glance at Langdon, who was herding his men, like a shepherd with his flock, closer within the shelter of the lane. "Ay, but we'll have full satisfaction after sun up," cried the aide-de-camp, his voice quivering with excitement. "The general is waiting just across the little footbridge towards the knoll, sir. You can see almost their entire position from there. He wishes you to join him a moment. I'll guide you."

Along the lane they urged their steeds. A

minute's swift trot brought them to the southern outskirts of the village, and the flats of the ricefields, seamed by little ridges of stiffened mud and streaked by winding estuaries, lay before them,—the banks of the main stream, the Tripa, fringed with jetting fires. A narrow path ran to the edge of the slough that split the brigade in twain and turned back towards the rearward city. Beyond it dimly outlined forms crouched in the open fields behind the firing-line of the Columbias. A frail footbridge, thrown up by the engineers, spanned the sluggish tide, and white chips flew from the hand-rail as the top was grazed by whistling lead. Under a clump of bamboo at the edge of the lane three orderlies were holding a little bunch of horses. The officers, throwing themselves from saddle and bending low, sped swiftly out along the narrow dyke and over the swaying bridge. "Where's Colonel Nathan?" demanded the chief, as he saw only his aide and Langdon. "I told you to find him first."

"I did, sir, and gave the message," was the instant reply.

Up from the knoll where the field guns were thundering, with soldierly salute, came the stalwart colonel of the Columbias. The commander of the Evergreens, silent and attentive, was al-

ready there and listening to the rapid instructions of the brigadier. These in swift, terse words were repeated to the other field officers as they reported. There was no mistaking the intensity of their zeal and interest. But still no Nathan appeared. "Never mind," said the chief, pointing to where the Columbias were volleying at the lines across the Tripa. "We'll find him out there with his men, probably," and led the way back across the slough. "Not much we won't," growled the colonel of the Columbias, in satiric aside, to silent Langdon. "If the general knew him as Melville does, he'd—know better. Big luck for Nathan he isn't in Melville's brigade!"

"Oh, never you fear but the Old Man'll cinch him," spoke up a staff officer, in eager loyalty to his chief, stumbling on the dyke as he spoke. "After you, colonel. By God! There's Nathan now!"

The light had broadened. The roofs and walls of Santa Ana stood in sharp black silhouette against the Orient sky. Forms and even faces now could be recognized a dozen rods away, and here at the edge of the Paco suburb, still sheltered by the walls, stood Nathan, in crouching attitude, peering at them as they came. The general, turning abruptly to the right, had

moved away towards the firing-line. His aide swiftly followed, and Langdon, returning for his horse, came face to face at the end of the lane with the man who almost ten years before had driven him from the army. The silver leaf that told of equal grade in the volunteers gleamed on the shoulder of each, but one had worn it since the first of May, the other not until three months later. With the sound of every volley from beyond the Tripa a flight of bullets whistled across the dyke and footbridge and swept the level fields. Erect and composed Eric Langdon passed from the zone of fire into that of comparative safety, to find the pathway blocked by this pallid man and nervous, fidgeting pony. The lieutenant-colonel of the Columbias turned in sore embarrassment and funk, kicked the ribs of his luckless steed, then awkwardly backed him off the track and stood aside to let his senior by. With utter contempt in his frowning eyes, Langdon looked his former captain in the face, passed him without a word, and then was astonished to hear the well-remembered voice, no longer loud and truculent, yet something almost like defiance or desperation rang in the harsh, tremulous announcement.

"I suppose you know that Melville's killed and we're ordered to fall back!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE guns were stilled at Battery Knoll, and the gunners, officers and men, clustered upon every little mound and salient, gazing eagerly out over the smoke-shrouded field before them. Off to the right front, fire spitting still, grim Block-House 12 seemed the centre of an incipient conflagration. Over at the left front on the Santa Ana road its twin, Number 11, appeared as though afloat in slowly drifting clouds of bluish-gray. Across the dyke-ribbed flats of the ricefields that stretched away eastward and towards the Pasig to the left, long lines of cheering soldiery were sweeping to and beyond the gray walls, where the Tagals were still desperately battling to save their batteries. Two battalions of the Columbias, their colonel in their midst, were dashing straight at the insurgent works along the Guadalupe road. The right wing of the Evergreens, with ringing cheer, had enveloped the native section of the pretty suburban town, and were crashing through bamboo and nipa, fighting their heroic way straight for the Plaza and the river-bank beyond, rolling up the yelling bands of brown men, well-nigh panic-

stricken at the dash and vigor of the American advance. Across the Concordia, at the heels of the brigade commander, the Washoes had carried their colors, all book rules on the subject thrown with the silken folds to the winds of the morning. And then in magnificent, irresistible charge bore down with the bayonet on the redoubts and earthworks towards the river, and, side by side with the Evergreen left and two of the reserve companies of the Columbias, had swept the field like a cyclone, whirling the yelling rebels into the stream, tumbling over guns, gunners, and crouching foes until in a mad chorus of exultant cheers they lined up at the bank, over which in terror scores of their tormentors of the early hours had plunged in hopes of reaching the opposite shore. Along the parapets, among the bamboo thickets, under the walls of the old gray convent, and everywhere across the open field the dead and wounded lay in little pools of brownish-red, brave lads in blue and tumbled heaps of stricken foemen, their loose, light uniforms all stained and soaked with gore. Not until after five long hours of patient endurance had the brigade received the longed-for, prayed-for word to advance, and the pent-up rage for battle burst like a torrent on an astonished foe swept helplessly before it. Foremost

in the magnificent charge of his cheering men Langdon, sword in hand, had leaped among the guns at the river redoubt, his cheek seamed by the stinging lash of a bullet, his hat-brim torn by the desperate lunge of a *bolo*, the last thrust of a cursing little Tagal officer fighting like a rat in a corner, for the bayonet of a lusty sergeant had transfixed him on the spot. Close under the outer works a little sad-eyed squad had gathered about the stricken form of the gallant old major, dying sword in hand and with almost a smile on his lips as Langdon knelt and raised the grizzled head and stanchd the blood that welled from a mortal wound. Victory—brilliant, complete, decisive—had rewarded their determined assault,—the warm hand-clasp, the enthusiastic praise of the brigade commander,—his “Gloriously done, Langdon!” bringing cheer after cheer from the exultant battalions, but the heart of the colonel was sore. It was hard to lose such lives as these that were ebbing away there in all the radiance of the morning sunshine. It was sad to part with this trusted and loyal subordinate. It was bitter to think that that other and older friend who had never swerved in sorrow and adversity now lay deaf to the tidings of this most soldierly achievement,—that Melville might never know how

thorough had been Langdon's vindication of the faith and trust reposed in him. Silently, sadly, the Washoes bore the dying major back to the walls of the old convent within the lines. Reverently they began the gathering up of the dead, and tenderly, these stout-hearted fellows, they strove to minister to the wounded, friend and foe alike, while cowed, scowling, sullen, the luckless prisoners were swept up from the curving shores, from under the floors of native huts, from the ditches and drains along the village walls. Away out to the right front, up the river road towards Guadalupe, the pursuing Columbias were still volleying at Ricarti's rear-guard, what there was left of it,—but Santa Ana, with all its stores of ammunition and supplies, was the prize of the brigade, and the veteran general of division, riding out to survey the scene and congratulate the victors, stopped to shake hands with Langdon, and add his word of praise and compliment and to inquire as to his wound. "Only a pin-scratch, general, that wouldn't hurt at all if I could know there was no truth in the story that General Melville is killed."

"Oh, I won't believe it!" said the chief. "Your only authority—and mine—is Colonel Nathan, and Nathan's only authority is that batch of correspondents he's been housing for

the past week. They had it that you were mortally hit and half your regiment killed. Where is Colonel Nathan, anyhow?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Langdon, guardedly. "I haven't seen him since—day-break."

The major-general turned in saddle and looked back across the bloody field towards the roofs of Paco glinting between him and the white towers of Manila, another mile beyond. The pale-blue clouds had drifted away. In their place dense volumes of black smoke were beginning to roll skyward from three or four points in the thronging suburb, and the crackle of burning bamboo sounded like a distant fusillade.

"They've been firing on our wounded and ambulances from the church and native houses," said the general, briefly. He was thinking—he couldn't help it—of the words of two battery officers he had overheard as he stood at the knoll, watching the triumphant advance of his division. Rodney May was the first speaker, and the battery commander had heard without either reproof or dissent.

"It's just what Eric said at Pawnee ten years ago. He has come steadily up and Nathan gone steadily down in the good opinion of every square man in the regiment. Yesterday they

were on a level as far as rank goes: to-day I'm betting Langdon's name goes in for brevet and Nathan's won't be heard of."

"Where on earth is Colonel Nathan?" asked the brigade commander, as he reined in on the Plaza under the walls of the great church, where two companies of the Columbias were fanning their hot faces with their broad-brimmed hats, and men looked at each other and grinned.

"Where on earth is Colonel Nathan?" again demanded the division chief, as he and the brigadier rode through the smoke of blazing nipa huts from whose walls the lurking Tagal rifles had shot down but a few moments before attendants of the wounded, friend and foe alike. A surgeon looking up from the stretcher over which he was bending ducked his head towards distant Paco.

"Away back yonder, general. You won't find him this side of the Concordia." And the two seniors exchanged glances. Not until out of range of listening ears was another word spoken. Then the division commander began to free himself of his impressions.

"When the story of this day's work is told, your Washoes and Westerners, especially Langdon, will be glorified," said he, "but what shall be said of Nathan?"

What indeed? The chief and his officers and men to the last boy orderly might have their opinion as to that ingenious soldier, but what were they as compared with the Press? Six long weeks followed before the coming of the steamers with the home papers and their first accounts of the fierce battling of that eventful Sunday about Manila,—weeks in which Langdon and the devoted Washoes went from one scene of sharp fighting to another, stripped from the slender line of the victorious First Division and sent to strengthen the Second in its northern march on Malolos. They fought like veterans in the assault at Caloocan. They half forded, half swam one swift stream after another, and charged half naked the stampeded Tagals in the opposing trenches. They were foremost in the rush on the railway bridge that scorching March morning, and landed their colors on the opposite bank ahead of all rivals, but there the tide of their success took adverse turn, for their gallant leader was shot down with a brass-bound slug that tore an ugly gash in the side, and ten days later Eric Langdon burned with pain and fever under the roof where lay, convalescing of the wounds received early in the first day's fight, his gallant and devoted friend, Melville. Langdon pulled through, thanks to native strength

and constitution and the tireless devotion and professional skill of the surgeon who received him, unconscious and sore spent, from the hands of the hospital corps. "Doing as well, general, as we can expect after so severe a wound," was Dr. Armistead's almost daily report for a week. "But, what will the waking be?"

"If you will permit me, Dr. Armistead, that is a matter with which I shall charge myself. It's time Langdon knew the truth."

And so one day when the soft sea-breeze was blowing in from the bay, now studded with transports bringing the long-delayed reënforcements, as Langdon lay, weak, but once again clear-headed and craving news of his men, Melville hobbled to his bedside and signalled to the attendant to slip away. "Langdon, old fellow," he asked, as they were left alone, "feel as though you could bear a shock to-day? Your old division commander came in to say good-by while you were asleep. You are named for the medal of honor and the brevet of brigadier-general. I wrote the news—home—by last post."

The pale, thin face on the pillow lighted with a faint flush of pleasure. The long, slender fingers feebly clasped the warm hand extended in greeting.

"How long before I can be in saddle again?"

was the question framed by his pallid lips, and the voice was but the ghost of that that rang like a clarion over the field at Santa Ana and swung the Washoes in to their magnificent charge.

"Two months—or three, perhaps, and not that, possibly, without a sea-voyage to Japan or a run to Australia. You had a fearful wound, Eric, and under God's providence nothing but the best of surgeons and constitutions saved you. Dr. Meade is looking after you now that all is going so well, but for two weeks, lad, it was nip and tuck, and have you any idea who—who pulled you through?"

Langdon's eyes spoke negation and inquiry both.

"Dr. Armistead, Eric."

The patient half rose on his pillow, no faint flush this time on his brow, but Melville's hand at once rebuked and restrained him.

"There's a story you ought to hear, Langdon, and it is one I'll vouch for. Shut your eyes and lie quiet now, for I'm going to tell it."

And so in far-away Manila, with his medal of honor in sight as it were, and his soldier ambition well-nigh fully realized, the wounded soldier heard from the lips of his best and stanchest friend the tale of Armistead's real relations with

the woman who, bearing Langdon's name, had so nearly wrecked his life. The early boyish infatuation of the young Virginian was not concealed. The lad well-nigh worshipped his pretty, frivolous kinswoman, and had endowed her with mental gifts and moral attributes that only with maturing years he found fictitious, and still, like a knight of old, he had stood between her and temptation, had striven manfully to lead her to the light and interpose between her and the sting of scandal. The true story of the encounter at the Shorehan Langdon heard at last, and hid his face in sorrow and contrition. He had so easily believed ill of Armistead,—he had so utterly misjudged him.

“Ask him to—come to me—in a day or two, will you, general?” he said, faintly pressing Melville's hand. “I need to think over this. It is all—so different.” And Melville stole away and left him with the brief Oriental twilight just shrouding the skies.

And that night there was uproar in the First Division. There were shouts of derisive laughter and much misuse of gospel phrase, and a gathering of officers of all grades about campfires and misty kerosene or candle, for as soon as men had skimmed through the letters from loved ones at home they swarmed to read or hear

what the papers had to say of the battle about Manila, for that March day had brought them huge store of journals from all over the States, and amidst explosions of wrath or ridicule bearded lips retailed the tremendous story of the fight as told by "our own correspondent" at the front, and then there was a rush to find the lieutenant-colonel of the Columbias, who had lost no time in ordering out his carriage and driving back from the eastward lines to the shelter of the walled city.

Tremendous indeed was the story of the doings of the doughty First Division! Men looked in vain for mention of the names that were as household words along the ranks. Casually there was reference to certain generals, because their commands had been heavily engaged, but of the heroic array of field officers, colonels, lieutenant-colonels, and majors, who had led their regiments and battalions to the charge and fought with the foremost lines, not one appeared in print. The hero of the day, according to Reuter's despatches in the journals of London and Paris, according to the cables from the front of the representatives of the great papers of the United States, was the lieutenant-colonel of the Columbias, the daring and intrepid Nathan who had never once appeared upon the scene. It was

Nathan who, pistol in one hand and torch in the other, had led his devoted band through the barricaded streets of the rebel-infested suburbs, facing a furious storm of leaden hail, driving the lurking Tagals from wall to wall, from refuge to refuge, scattering death and destruction wherever he went. It was Nathan who, like Napoleon at Lodi, charged across the stone bridge on the broad *calzada* in face of belching cannon and shrieking grape and canister. It was Nathan who stormed the solid walls of the cemetery, lined with rebel riflemen, Nathan who scaled the blazing tower of the cathedral and hurled the shrieking assassins from their lair, Nathan who heard the piteous appeal for aid of the regulars of the comrade brigade and personally rushed with a handful of his devoted men, and in headlong charge swept the exultant foe from the front of the sore-stricken line! It was stirring to hear the "doughboys" expound and explode over that statement. It was shocking to listen to the language of those veteran Indian-fighters when they read of that piteous appeal. It was startling to hear the opinions expressed as to their alleged rescuer and of those correspondents. It was edifying to hear Nathan's virtuous protests before the impromptu gathering of exasperated officers the following

day. "I had nothing whatever to do with it," said he. "I'm in nowise responsible for what the correspondents wrote." But the division could not forget that for days and weeks Nathan's quarters had been the home and head centre of several civilians, since found to be journalists, and a wounded Washoe officer went so far as to swear that, lying in his ambulance late the afternoon of the battle and waiting his turn to be attended, he heard Nathan telling the story of the terrific doings of the day, and peering out, saw the colonel surrounded by a squad of pencil-wielders. The wrath of the division could not be compassed in words, but what cared Nathan for that? For weeks, at least, he was the hero of Manila. The "Seattle" cabled its congratulation and spoke of his coming stars. Orators clamored for his immediate promotion and referred to him as the peer of Hobson, Wainwright, and Bagley (the army seemed to be short on conspicuous deeds though rather long in the list of its dead). The illustrated papers had full-page pictures of the impetuous colonel dashing into the midst of furiously fighting insurgents, and Nathan's official report told of the numbers that assailed the little rear-guard from window, wall, and tower. But the division shook its head and said, "Who was hit on your

side? Where are the dead of theirs?" So far as evidence was concerned, the desperate battling in the suburban streets that was Nathan's excuse for failing to fight with his comrades at the front had embraced not one single victim. And then came the turn of the tide, the letters from the men who fought and knew whereof they spoke, and the nascent star the newspapers so confidently claimed and discovered was set forever.

CHAPTER XX

THE summer had come and gone. The State regiments were summoned home for muster-out, and thrice their number in regulars and national volunteers were gone or going to Manila. Only in small bodies and rather as banditti or guerillas were the enemy encountered. The lightning dashes of the cavalry north and south in Luzon and the tireless scouts and marches of the infantry had scattered the insurgents in every direction. The war had dwindled to a campaign of detachments, "like old Arizona days," as the troopers put it, and, full of honors and the consciousness of duty faithfully done, with thinned ranks and in many instances thin, gaunt faces, the soldiery of the wide West were sailing back across the seas and being welcomed with tumultuous acclaim at San Francisco. The Columbias mourned the loss of many a gallant lad left buried in the Philippines, but parted without perceptible emotion with their original lieutenant-colonel. Nathan resigned the silver leaves long months before they fought their last fight, preferring brief garrison duty with his battery. So many colonels and majors seemed to get

picked off by the rebel rifles that it became positively unsafe to take the field, said a saturnine staff officer of the commanding general, and that might have influenced Nathan's action. But promotions in the artillery arm speedily gave him, under the law, the grade of major, and it was better to be a live major of regulars at a comfortable station in the States than a lieutenant-colonel of volunteers in the mud and rain and discomfort of Luzon. He found a new name awaiting him at the Presidio, and whenever he began to talk about the stirring times around Manila, men would wink at each other and satirists make allusion to Thackeray and "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan." Nathan was too shrewd not to see that a slur of some kind was meant. He had read very little of Thackeray, but found means to get a copy of that famous skit, unbeknownst to any associate for a time, and read it, as his valet swore, in the privacy of his quarters, and hurled the offending volume, with furious blasphemy, into the fireplace, but quit talking all the same about Manila. Mrs. Nathan came to join him at San Francisco, and they soon opened house in sumptuous style, and there under the domestic roof, at least, he was spared the quizzical questions rained upon him when he showed at club

or mess-room. Nathan became very domestic as a result, but even the garrison children caught the flying gossip, and little Jack Pitcher won renown abroad and a sound spanking at home by the ingenuous query piped out one afternoon when the Nathans' piazza was rustling with the silks and satins of visitors from fort and town. Over the low hum of conversation and the soft music of the band on the parade the shrill childish treble was heard to squeak, "Say, major, what makes papa and the other officers call you Major Ga'gin? *Is* your first name Goliar?" Bless the innocence of childhood! Nathan thought of Herod and wished him back on earth and at his old occupation in Judæa. That story went from post to post and mouth to mouth. The volunteers were coming back with every transport, and being camped on the reservation pending their muster-out. The Columbias arrived, and Nathan arranged a big dinner for the officers, and rode about among the men,—who, somehow, couldn't seem to see him, and many wouldn't even salute. Only a meagre dozen of the junior officers attended that feast. It flattened dolefully despite the lavish flow of wine. Every field officer "regretted," and certain of the captains, possibly unschooled in the ways of society, never even acknowledged the courtesy.

Major Train, who had been promoted lieutenant-colonel on Nathan's resignation, would not even notice him. The colonel's greeting was grave and distant. Some of the men laughed aloud when Nathan rode over to camp, and the situation was the talk of the great assemblage of returning volunteers, when in came the transport with the war-worn Washoes, Eric Langdon at their head, tumultuously greeted by the throng the day they disembarked. Then Nathan asked for leave of absence. In civilian dress, and accompanied by his wife and a single servant, he drove to the ferry unnoticed of the cheering crowds that rent the air with shouts for Langdon and his devoted men.

It took full a fortnight to complete the examinations and all the preliminary papers before the final muster-out of the brave band of brothers they had become. There were returning regiments in whose membership there lived the ranklings of discord and jealousy, but the Washoes had but one creed and no recriminations. They believed in God, they loved their country, and they swore by Eric Langdon. The governor and his staff came by special train from the northeast to meet them on their return, and Cresswell, too, was there and both their Senators, and many men with the bees of possible office buzz-

ing in their bonnets, and all of these had much to say in public, and in all their many speeches to the listening warriors, in praise of their heroic colonel, the one thing sure to evoke tumultuous applause,—and much to say in private to that silent soldier himself. The burden of their united song was a source of keen and whimsical delight to Langdon and to Melville, who with his household was awaiting orders of the War Department at the Colonial. It would be so very much better for Langdon, said all these statesmen, to accept the high commission they proposed obtaining for him in the regular service than to think of entering political life, which they could truthfully assure him was so sadly uncertain and full of disappointments. Langdon listened with the same quizzical smile, but said very little. He knew perfectly well that all Washoe couldn't change the laws, and that nothing short of a special act of Congress could place him in the army with any rank he cared to accept. He had been tendered the colonelcy of one of the new regiments, but the surgeons shook their heads. Cresswell clamored for his return to the office, the *Washoe Zephyr*, that was at odds with the governor, swung out its banner to the breeze with "For governor, General Eric Langdon, the hero of Manila," irre-

spective of the fact that there had been a hundred or more equally heroic and as little versed in politics. It was "done for devilment," as the governor's henchmen took pains to assure Langdon, but most people throughout the State, and the regiment to a man, took it seriously, and machine statesmen far and near were sorely worried. There is nothing so sure to stir things the wrong way for all parties, and principally for himself, as the injection of the martial hero into politics. Langdon was for announcing in so many words that he would never permit the use of his name, but Cresswell, the veteran of a dozen campaigns, bound him to silence. "Think what you please, do what you please when the time comes, but meanwhile keep your own counsel. No matter if you don't want the governorship—or any civil office, let 'em think you do. It's the surest way to get what you do want." The whole State delegation in Congress, the governor and his backers, were clamoring by wire for Langdon's immediate promotion to the grade of brigadier-general. That would insure his going back to the Philippines and being far out of the field when nominations were in order. But Washoe is too many hundreds of miles from Washington for them to importune in person, and letters and telegrams are far easier to an-

swer than personal pleas, and "influence," said Melville, "is inversely as the square of the distance." The brevet to the silver star was wired without much objection at the War Office, and the Washoes roared with joy over the news that for conspicuous bravery in half a dozen actions, including Baligabangbang, where he was severely wounded, their beloved colonel was brevetted a general. They thought it amounted to something. Many a statesman now ponderously hailed him as general, and then privately told him how hard it was to bring it about, but that he, confidentially, "had fixed it with McKinley," and Langdon smiled his thanks and thought what he pleased. What the governor and Senator Silver and certain others strove to extract from him was the statement that under no circumstances would he accept a nomination, and numerous and ingenious were the efforts of the correspondents to trap him into interviews that might lead up to that question. The most they could wire to their papers was that General Langdon resolutely refused to discuss politics or to say what he would do. The people of the State were shouting for the return of the regiment as a body and for a parade through the streets of the capital, and speech-making and welcome and all that, and the governor and

others who had come full of just such a project now took alarm at what might become a great popular ovation to Langdon. If there were only some way of tempting him to talk!—to say something!—then they might be able to twist and distort and mangle it in such a way as to use it to his detriment. But with rare discretion Langdon refused to say a word for publication, and only three men, Melville, Cresswell, and himself, knew his real sentiments. “Keep ’em guessing,” said Cresswell. “They may be so scared that they’ll really go on to Washington and say in so many words that if you are not sent back a brigadier-general the whole political pot will be upset and the devil to pay in Washoe.”

It was a relief at night to get away from the thronging camp and the importunities of statecraft and to find refuge at Melville’s quiet, cozy suite of rooms at the homelike old hostelry. Lips that smiled and eyes that shone were ever there to welcome him, and with the general he could talk unreservedly. Neither by education nor temperament was he fitted for a political life. Its intrigues and devices were detestable to him, its associations galling. As a lawyer he had seen, he had *had* to see, much of the chicanery with which the whole edifice is surrounded. He had no ambition in that direction.

His law practice had begun to be lucrative before the outbreak of the war, and bade fair to become more so as soon as he could resume work. All the old debts, with interest, had long since been paid. He had bought land and was drawing plans for a pretty home when the trumpets sounded to arms. He had even begun to dream of a chatelaine for that chateau. Certain batteries of the old regiment were stationed in the harbor, and officers who were his contemporaries in the old days at Pawnee, seniors and juniors both, now came to his disciplined, well-ordered camp and looked with appreciative eyes upon those stalwart, seasoned battalions and envied him his experience and opportunities. Torrance had got his double bars at last and gone on to Manila as the volunteers were coming home, but he had long since broken with Nathan, and the soldier in him sought reconciliation with the man who had won such honors in the campaign. The full realization of the wrong he had done Langdon long since dawned upon him, and yet how horribly awkward was his position! Other men in the regiment, who had quarrelled with their kind and wanted to end the strain of long misunderstanding, could go to Melville, sure of sound advice and sympathetic aid. Melville would harmonize where others only med-

dled. But Torrance was barred. Melville was the one man to whom he could not go, for in his rancor he had so far forgotten himself and what was due a woman as to name one of Melville's household in his denunciation of his brother lieutenant. Langdon had cordially greeted and received certain of the old regiment who had held aloof in his days of trouble, but who came to him frankly and told him of their contrition and regret. They had wronged only Langdon: Torrance had spoken disdainfully of a brave girl whose offence, in the eyes of the small snob element at Pawnee, was that she stood by the sorrowing man and thought him despitefully used, and now would Langdon be apt to forgive an affront to Ethel Grahame? Mrs. Torrance, after the new captain sailed for Manila, wished to take rooms with these pleasant army people at their favorite caravanserai. She loved society, but everybody knew her husband had been knocked flat by Langdon for impertinent mention of Miss Grahame, and, though it happened ten years before, the breach had never been healed. Torrance had never sought pardon. How *could* she go there? The Nathans were taking the mountain air up at Tahoe, waiting for the volunteers to disperse, but the major's leave was for only two weeks. The

Washoes were still in camp and the day of muster-out not yet determined. The governor and his satellites were now less clamorous for speedy settlement of their papers and somewhat given to suggestion that, after all, "It wouldn't pay for the regiment to come to the capital. They wouldn't have their arms and their equipments, etc., all having to be turned in at the Presidio, so it would hardly be like a military parade. All things considered, it would be just as well for the boys to scatter at 'Frisco and each choose his own homeward way." So the military authorities bent their energies towards getting rid of those regiments whose statesmen were clamorous, and thus it happened that the Nathans returned while the Washoes were still in camp, and it might have been better had that leave been extended.

One glorious autumn morning the regiment formed line for final review, and in great numbers civilians, soldiers, and women fair were assembled to witness the ceremony. The Columbians had been paid off to the last man and given their discharge, but several of their officers still lingered about the city. The Evergreens had been welcomed home, and fêted and feasted to their hearts' content. Not a company had gone on its way without stop-

ping for a parting call and cheer at Langdon's camp. The commanding general and his staff, escorted by a troop of cavalry from the barracks and greeted by the thunder of the garrison guns, took place in front of the centre of the long, statuesque line. For the last time the Washoes came out in khaki, and very fit and soldierly they looked, despite the relaxation of the long homeward voyage and the days of waiting about the city. To right and left of the reviewing-point were scores of carriages from town, and an aide-de-camp had ridden to General Melville's with the compliments of the department commander and an invitation to draw up close to the staff, where a far better view could be had, and so it happened that Mrs. Melville and Ethel Grahame sat smiling within the charmed circle,—the space parcelled off by sentries for the immediate party of the reviewing officials. The general left his station and rode up beside them and doffed his plumed chapeau. "I had hoped to have you ride with us to-day, Melville," said he, "but I suppose the doctors must have their way. Miss Grahame, I saw you in saddle in the park yesterday, and I envied your escort." The general was nothing if not gallant. "Wonderful how some men recuperate from wounds received in *battle*," continued the

double-starred veteran, and gazed impressively at Miss Grahame, and glanced at Langdon, sitting erect half-way across the field. It seemed to the commander that he had put it very neatly, though the lady failed to appear profoundly impressed. She wished to know the cause of the delay, for the Washoes were now standing at ease. "Oh, the governor and some of his people!" explained the chief, with slight annoyance in his tone. "It seems they have been entertained over at the post, but they're coming now," he added, as two carriages, escorted by three or four horsemen, came sweeping over the brow of the northward height. Impatient eyes glanced thitherward, and presently half the waiting lines in khaki and dozens among the carriage-loads of lookers-on were aware that there was a hitch of some kind up towards that end of the field.

"Hullo!" said the general. "What's amiss yonder?" for all on a sudden the carriages of the approaching dignitaries had stopped at the sentry-line, and there was running and commotion. Then Langdon was seen to spur rapidly to the spot, and in one minute after his appearance on the scene of a violent scuffle matters were straightened out. The carriages with some flustered-looking civilians were driving down to the

reviewing point, and the colonel galloped back to his post. Three horsemen presently rode slowly back towards the garrison, and a curious crowd surrounded a little knot of angered and excited men. All in that brief space of time an odd thing had happened.

It seems that Nathan had tendered certain hospitalities to the governor and his attendant officials,—that there had been a champagne breakfast, prolonged beyond the limits,—that Nathan, his adjutant, and orderly essayed to escort the carriages of their guests to the reviewing point, and that when they reached the sentry-lines a brown-cheeked, stalwart young fellow had presented arms to the governor, but lowered his bayonet and said “Halt!” to the major.

“I’m escorting the governor of Washoe!” said Nathan, flushed and angry.

“So I see, sir,” said the Washoe private, a university lad who knew whereof he spoke, “but my orders are imperative. The governor and the State officials can pass in their carriages. All others must keep off the field.”

“This is damned insolence!” shouted Nathan, flushed with wine and furious at the detention with the consequent humiliation. “Go on, driver! Out of the way, you!”

The coachman whipped up, knowing no better. The major spurred. His powerful horse sprang forward, but in a second the lithe Westerner had seized him by the bit and, bearing him back, yelled lustily for the corporal of the guard. Mad with rage, Nathan lashed with his hunting-crop at the young soldier's head, but in another instant two men, one in the uniform of a lieutenant of infantry, the other in civilian dress, sprang to the aid of the sentry. One of them seized Nathan's left foot in both hands, and by an old and well-known trick, suddenly heaving, tumbled the raging, red-faced officer head foremost out of saddle. He landed heavily, but labored presently to his feet, choking with fury and well-nigh bereft of his senses. The corporal had come with a rush.

"Arrest these men!" roared Nathan. "They've attacked me—an officer on duty—escorting a governor! Put that sentry in the guard tent!"

"The sentry was only doing his duty, sir," began the corporal. "Those were his orders."

"Orders from that damned safe-robbing scoundrel of a militia colonel out yonder——"

Whack! That was Nathan's last shot for many a day. The young man in civilian dress darted in and landed a scientific swing on the jaw that dropped the luckless officer like a log.

Nathan lay for a moment stunned, then looked up dazed and helpless into the grave face of Eric Langdon.

"Get your major home at once," the colonel replied to the adjutant's hurried, embarrassed explanation. "The matter shall be fully investigated. Who—struck him?"

"I did, General Langdon," spoke up the assailant, with blood in his eye and wrath on his tongue. "Captain Martin, late Second Columbus, sir, and I'm ready to answer for it to him or to anybody—here or anywhere. He lashed a sentry in the discharge of his duty,—and if that isn't enough, by heaven!—— Well, you heard what he said?" And the young captain appealed to the crowd.

That evening there was a never-to-be-forgotten scene in front of the colonel's tent in the camp of the Washoes. Six hundred strong, officers and men, massed in solid phalanx, silent, bareheaded, there stood the two battalions, while their spokesman, his voice trembling with emotion, strove to say to the loved and honored commander that the heart of the whole regiment went with the beautiful sword they gave him in parting tribute. Close to the colonel on one side were grouped the governor, his staff and State officers, on the other a large party of offi-

cers and ladies, Melville and his household in their midst. Rodney May, with one arm in a sling, had tendered the other, hardly knowing what he did, to Ethel Grahame, who, unaccountably, had taken it. Hovering about the skirts of the crowd an old darky, bowed and decrepit, was whimpering with joy. On the flanks of the battalion, as though by some spontaneous impulse, were gathered hundreds of other soldiery, regulars from the batteries, volunteers still serving in the neighboring camps, and all were hushed and all were hanging on the words of the soldier spokesman as he told of the scenes of battle across the wide surges of the ocean, of the never-failing care of the colonel for his men, of his daring leadership, of his almost fatherly devotion to their wounded and stricken. Vehemently the statesmen applauded every telling point, and the soldiers followed suit, but presently the major came to speak of the future,—of the severance of the soldier ties that bound them,—of the love and trust and faith with which their hearts would follow their soldier leader,—of the pride and confidence with which they hailed the honors still in store for him,—and here the Washoes broke loose and roared applause and acclamation, and then came the time to say farewell, but here their orator broke

down. "Speak for yourselves, boys," he choked. "I can't say another word." And "the boys," breaking ranks, bore down on their commander in tumultuously cheering torrents, officers and men grasping his extended hands, unashamed of the dew that dimmed their eyes, unafraid of rebuke or regulation, and when at last they were dispersed and gone and had cheered to the echo his few brief, heartfelt words of thanks and farewell, and May and Melville and the comrades of the old, old days had pressed his hands, now well-nigh crushed and nerveless, and he could turn again to see what had become of that beautiful sword, it had found its way, somehow, to Ethel Grahame, who stood gazing after the departing soldiery, her soft eyes swimming in tears.

The sound of cheering borne on the evening breeze swept through the bowered row of officers' quarters in the garrison, close at hand, but there was strange hush at Nathan's, whose piazza rustled, as a rule, with the silks and satins of society. Investigation of the morning episode had been prompt and searching. The commanding general had seen the fracas from afar. His own staff officer made report, his own orders had been defied, for, thanks to an overeager crowd at a previous ceremony, the chief of staff

had written that except such persons as should be personally bidden, only the general, his staff and escort, with the State officials, should be allowed within the line of sentries. Nathan's self-appointment as escort to the governor failed of confirmation. The sentinel had acted strictly in accordance with his orders. The major had committed one of the gravest crimes known to military law, first in refusing to obey,—second in daring to strike—the sentry. Captain Martin and his associates, late of the Columbias, were interrogated by the judge-advocate of the department and bidden to hold themselves in readiness to testify before the court that would be convened forthwith, for Major Nathan had been placed in close arrest.

But that wasn't all. Cresswell was a hard hater and as hard a hitter. Nathan's vile insult had been audible to a dozen by-standers, and though Langdon had not been allowed to hear of it, Cresswell followed up the rumor and got the exact words. In formulating the charges against the officer it was considered both unnecessary and unwise to refer to them. There was quite enough to dismiss him from the service without allusion to his insane outbreak, but Cresswell wasn't satisfied. He had never abandoned his theory that young Betts was the

culprit, and long years after the occurrence and soon after the senior's transfer to another road, there leaked a story from the yards that had been suppressed only so long as Betts was influential, and the young man fled from Brentwood between two days—no one knew whither. The matter caused no little talk at the time, for the Road made no effort to run him down. It was learned later that a shortage of upward of a thousand dollars was "squared" by relatives of the fugitive, and that, it was supposed, would end the matter.

Perhaps it might have done so but for Nathan's reiteration of the old slander, and there was a scene in the lobby of the Palace Hotel one evening just within the week of the episode, when the president of the "Seattle," who had hastened from Chicago in response to "wires" from the Nathans, and who had had a long interview with the accused officer that morning, and a short one, a very short one, with the chief of staff that afternoon, came sauntering down in evening dress to dinner, a brace of magnates with him. The trio was suddenly accosted by Judge Cresswell, who presented his card and delivered himself substantially as follows:

"Mr. Barclay, you were general manager of the 'Seattle' at the time of a certain safe rob-

bery in the 'Big Horn' office at Brentwood. You were satisfied of the innocence of Mr. Langdon, because immediately after his discharge by the 'Big Horn' you tendered him as good a position on your road. Is not this true?"

Barclay flushed. He was a man accustomed to dictate, and to be approached only with much show of deference. Triple doors and keepers guarded his office against intrusion, and a most icy reserve of manner discouraged all attempts at conversation except among his chosen intimates. But here was this confounded Kentuckian—he knew him well by sight and repute—accosting him with scant ceremony in a public place. He promptly froze, but Cresswell warmed to his work.

"I see it is and that you distinctly remember it. Moreover, you know that young Betts has been a fugitive from justice for months, and that his shortages, including the six hundred dollars, were paid by his father, now in your employ. I know this, because Mr. Burleigh, of the 'Big Horn,' has frankly told me that he long since told you, and yet your precious kinsman, whom you have hastened here to save if possible, dared last week publicly to speak of my partner, General Langdon, as the safe robber."

"Your partner subjected Major Nathan to a gross indignity," interjected Barclay, icily.

"My partner did not, sir, and it is my belief that you know he did not,—that the order Major Nathan refused to obey was that of the commanding general," and now Colonel Cresswell's voice resounded through the echoing lobby. "A gentleman, sir, from my section of the Union can't soil his hands by chastising a coward, as Major Nathan is held to be, and the protection of his wife's petticoats prevents my getting him where I can brand him as a liar, but as you are his next of kin, by marriage, at least, I have taken this opportunity of making known my sentiments to you. You have my address, sir. Good-evening to you, sir." And the colonel majestically lifted his hat and strolled magnificently away. Of course that *rencontre* was in the morning papers, and so at last Langdon heard of Nathan's language.

The formal muster-out of the Washoes was to occur that afternoon. Some few of the officers, commissioned in new regiments, were to return to Manila. Certain others were to remain awhile in San Francisco, but the bulk of the men would scatter for home soon after the final ceremony, the governor and his advisers having decided against the parade. Melville at break-

fast-time read the sensational account in the *Investigator* and the more conservative story of the *Carbuncle*. Within an hour he was at Langdon's tent, and found the colonel supervising the packing of his soldier goods and chattels. Each knew what was uppermost in the mind of the other, and Langdon bade his orderly excuse him to visitors a few moments, sent "Hurricane" to the camp post-office, and let down the flaps of the tent.

"That fellow is still in close arrest," said he, "and I cannot reach him until he is released."

"And then?" asked Melville, thoughtfully.

"Then—I shall cowhide him."

"Langdon," said the general, after a moment's reflection, "that's what brought me out here so early. Read this first."

It was a letter in Nathan's handwriting. Langdon took it slowly and with obvious repugnance, his eyes the while resting with inquiry and eagerness upon another missive, a little note that the general still retained. Opening the first, however, he read as follows:

"MY DEAR GENERAL MELVILLE,—A man never knows how friendless he is—in the army—unless luck has gone back on him and he is down. I am down. I see that I have made a

bad mess of it, and know there will be no sympathy for me on that court. I suppose you've seen the detail,—it's packed to convict, and, in the present exaggerated feeling as to the relative merits of the volunteers and regulars, my break seems much more serious than it really was. I merely lost my temper and said and did things that were—indeffensible, I suppose. But put yourself in my place. I had reason to believe I was being discriminated against, and that Colonel Langdon had purposely placed sentries there to publicly humiliate me. What would you think to have your horse backed almost from under you by a private soldier! I'll warrant that Colonel Langdon would have used the lash quicker than I did. In fact, I hardly struck the sentry at all, but of course it's useless to talk of it. They've about convinced Mr. Barclay that the least I can look for is dismissal, unless I can get those charges withdrawn. I am willing to admit I was hasty, or I suppose I ought to say violent, and I'm willing to do anything you say to make amends, both to the soldier in the case and to the colonel. A written apology, I suppose, is what they'll want——"

But Langdon's indignation rose with every line.

"Why do you show me this?" he asked. "It's

a contemptible letter! It's unworthy the faintest consideration."

"Well, would you cowhide a man whose words were unworthy of consideration, Eric? Think over that. Keep away from him to-morrow and come to us. Here's another note."

And the general sauntered out into the sunshine to chat with the gathering officers and to smile kindly and genially at the men, who never seemed to tire of rendering honors to their colonel's friend. He thought to give Langdon time to read his own letter, but little was needed. The dainty note when opened contained but the single word—

"Don't."

* * * * *

That night in the crowded station at Oakland pier the home-going Washoes seemed bent on raising the roof. Two special trains were there to whirl them away to the mountains. Their few belongings were stored aboard, but the word had passed that Langdon was there to see them off, and the rascals wouldn't go. Out they piled on the platform, shouting like mad, and surrounded him in tumultuous acclaim. They had hoisted him on a baggage-truck, and there was only one way to silence their clamor, that was

to speak. On the gallery and stairway stood a throng of people, men, women, and children, sympathetic witnesses of the stirring scene, Melville and his wife in their midst, Ethel Grahame, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes and with hands that trembled as they clasped the rail, bending forward as though she would not lose a word. Instinctively and as of old the Washoes hushed at his uplifted hand.

"I could not speak to you to-day," he said. "I cannot do you justice now. Your faith, your loyalty, your—yes, I dare say it—your affection I prize beyond all power of words to tell you, and the sorrow of parting would choke my utterance did I not know that we who have served so closely together as soldiers in the year gone by are to live together as friends and comrades and fellow-citizens of a beloved State, please God, for many a year to come."

Another uproarious cheer broke in upon and drowned his words. Railway officials were striving with all their power to herd the enthusiastic crowd aboard the cars. Regimental officers no longer exerted authority. Melville it was who settled the question. "We haven't a moment to spare if we're to go with this boat, Eric," he whispered, as he grasped his arm and then led him away.

A moment later the huge ferry-boat was sending a foaming rush of moonlit waters sternward against the receding piers. The passengers, as was their wont, were gathered within the glass-enclosed "saloon" of the upper deck, some few braving the breeze towards the bows, but Langdon stood gazing back over the seething flood and the fast-dimming lights of the ferry-house, his eyes on the last vestiges of the regiment, scores of whom had chased after him for a final cheer, his thoughts going back over the year of active service, of battle and campaign, he and those brave lads had spent together. But, little by little, the gaze relaxed and turned, following his heart, to the girl standing silent there at the rail. She was listening, breathless, to the cheers and farewells. She had marked the deep emotion in his eyes and in those of the tried and trusty comrades now fading from view. Stealthily, silently, Mrs. Melville had led her general within-doors and told him the night air was too raw for a wounded veteran.

"How about Eric?" queried he, with twinkling in his eyes.

"Leave him to—Ethel," was the answer of superior wisdom.

And so, ten years after the sad events that sent him adrift upon the world, Langdon turned,

as the last faint cheer followed them across the racing waters, marked her as she stood like one absorbed—entranced, threw one quick glance about him, then as quickly stepped to her side and seized within his own firm grasp the slender hands that were trembling at the rail. Then she, too, gave one startled look, saw that they were alone, and even under the pallor of the moonlight her brow flushed crimson. Lids and lashes drooped and veiled her swimming eyes, for the woman in her told her that, without a word, she stood confessed in the presence of her master, even though that master were looking imploringly into her downcast face, and the voice that stilled or swayed at will those hosts of stalwart men was trembling in its plea, adoring and passionate, for the love he craved in answer to that he so long had given. What was there left for her to say? Her lips moved—but he heard not. Eagerly he bent, lower, lower still, and then shyly, at last, they were upraised and—told him.

THE END

